Author:
Nicoll, Maggie L

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Creative expressions of protest: challenging reductive perceptions of the Algerian Hirak through street art, photography and music video published on Instagram and YouTube

Margaret Lily Nicoll

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Abstract

This study provides an analysis of photography, street art and music relating to the Algerian Hirak protests of 2019-2020. It asks: how do art and music relating to the Hirak challenge reductive perceptions of the movement? What role do Instagram and YouTube play in the influence and dissemination of these works? The research was motivated by the need to examine alternative and nuanced representations of the movement, combined with the growing importance of analysing how social media platforms are changing the ways we view art, listen to music, and relate to one another. It combines Postcolonial theory, specifically Edouard Glissant's notion of *opacité*, with Symbolic Interactionism theory applied to the cyberspace, to analyse how artists point to the irreducible diversity and collective nature of the Hirak, and the ways that social media platforms necessarily involve the audience and provide them with additional information beyond the frame. It reveals that artists and musicians challenge reductive perceptions of the movement through diverse aesthetic and audiovisual techniques, and that the specific architecture of the Instagram and YouTube platforms affect how the works are consumed, understood, and discussed by their audiences. It also finds that music videos on YouTube can contribute to stereotypes while simultaneously breaking others down. The study looks first at the photographic series *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* (2015-) by Ahmed Ait Issad and the street art project *La Main du Peuple* (2015-) by Merine Hadj Abderrahmane, both of which are exhibited on Instagram. It then moves on to a discussion of music videos on YouTube, starting with *Allo le Système !* (2019) by Raja Meziane, then *Liberté* (2019) by Soolking featuring Ouled el Bahdja, and finally *Libérez l'Algérie* (2019) by various artists.

Keywords: *Algerian Hirak, art, music, Instagram, YouTube*

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Margaret Nicoll

DATE: 24th September 2020

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1. Introduction

The Algerian Hirak protests of 2019-2020[1] were a complex network of ideologies, events, social action, and creative expression. As journalists and academics clamoured to pin down what was happening in the country, a series of assumptions and misinformed judgements became commonplace, which failed to capture the diverse nature of the movement, particularly when they came from outside the country. An in-depth look into the artistic expressions relating to, or created in support of, the protest movement can provide a more nuanced understanding of the events. By focusing on photography, street art, and music videos shared within the international cyberspaces of Instagram and YouTube, this thesis explores several alternative readings of the protests that exceed (and sometimes feed into) certain reductive perceptions, that are readily available to be viewed online by various diverse audiences.

Current scholarship has explored how Algerian artistic expression has communicated multiplicity and political engagement in the past (Laggoune-Aklouche 2019 [2007]; Gillet 2017, 2019 [2013]; Hiddleston 2005). There has also been significant research into the specific practices of viewing art and listening to music online, and how social media affects these experiences (Hjorth et al. 2016; MacDowall and De Souza 2018; King 2018). However, as the Hirak is a recent movement, this study contributes to a still-emerging body of work and addresses the need to combine scholarship on online art practices and social media with an understanding that art and music provide alternative ways of seeing this present-day political context. It will ask: how do art and music relating to the Hirak challenge reductive perceptions of the movement? What role do Instagram and YouTube play in the influence and dissemination of these works?

The study combines Edouard Glissant's notion of opacity (Glissant 2009; 1996; 1990), with Symbolic Interactionism theory applied to the online space. This provides a framework to interrogate how artists break down reductive perceptions and point to the incomprehensible diversity and collective nature of the Hirak. It also acts as a tool to examine the influence of Instagram and YouTube on the ways that art and music is consumed and understood by its audiences, as it becomes bound up with their expressions

[1] The future of the movement is currently unclear due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

of self in the cyberspace. I provide a close analysis of the artworks, considering each platform's specific contribution to the ways they are viewed and understood, notably through features such as location tags, captions, comments, and reaction videos. I argue that photography and images of street art use artistic techniques, such as colour contrast, to communicate a plural understanding of society and protest that challenges perceptions of the movement as an 'awakening', or that it was bound to descend into violence. This is nuanced further by the Instagram platform, which brings the artist and the audience closer together and provides access points to other sources of information. Music videos combine lyrical content with the audiovisual to counter the simplistic 'awakening' or 'violent' narratives, although they occasionally give rise to stereotypes themselves. The YouTube platform provides a space for users to discuss the work publicly, transporting the conversations to other content creators' pages and influencing the creation of reaction videos, exposing the songs to new audiences and providing a constant stream of additional information. Overall, experiencing art and music in the cyberspace is far removed from offline viewing practices, and the additional information provided by online platforms continuously points to further multiplicity beyond what the artist has chosen to represent.

1.1 Background

In early 2019, the Algerian government proposed a fifth mandate for then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. It was nearing the end of Bouteflika's twentieth year in power, after several constitutional amendments that allowed him to run for more than the maximum two terms. The 82-year-old president was in ill health after suffering a stroke in 2013 which left him wheelchair bound, and he was rarely seen in public. It was clear to many that he was not fit to be running the country and was being used as a figurehead for the network of elites to remain in power unchallenged. Indeed, Bouteflika was in hospital in Geneva at the time of the push for a fifth mandate, which 'reinforced the image of an out of touch and privileged elite who had failed Algerian public services, whilst profiting themselves in Europe' (Guemar et al. 2019, np). On 22nd February 2019, ten days after the announcement, mass protests broke out across the country for the first time in almost two decades. Although Bouteflika resigned in April 2019, the protests continued for 56 consecutive weeks until the COVID-19 outbreak brought them to a premature halt in March 2020. It was apparent that the protesters were calling not

only for Bouteflika to step down, but for the removal of the whole system: a predominant slogan of the movement was *yetnahaw ga3*, meaning 'they shall all be removed' in Algerian Arabic, or Darija (Haleh Davis et al. 2019, np).

The demonstrations came to be known as the Hirak, or 'movement', and the neologism *hirakiste* was created to refer to its participants. While it is common to refer to the Hirak as the will of 'the people', throughout this thesis I opt instead for the word *hirakistes* when discussing the protestors. This is because 'the people' assumes that all Algerians support the movement, which is not true, and glosses over a multitude of diversities within the population. Even amongst the *hirakistes* there are innumerable differences in identity, creed, ideology, and politics, but they are somewhat united around a set of common goals. Serres (2019) condenses these goals into two fundamental points: 'the refusal of an absurd and insulting political representation, and the immediate end to the pillage of the country's wealth' (np). As the Hirak emerged from a long and complex history and is itself irreducible to a singular narrative, it is important to interrogate common prejudices about the movement, whether they come from inside the country or abroad. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on two principal reductive perceptions: the description of the Hirak as an 'awakening', and the surprise expressed at the movement's peaceful nature, or belief that it would inevitably descend into violent chaos. I also look briefly at music video's capacity to create stereotypes.

1.2 Reductive perceptions

In March 2019, PhD student Amir Mohamed Aziz criticised the numerous media representations of the Hirak which described it as an unprecedented 'awakening' of the Algerian people, preferring instead to view the protests as the inevitable result of a series of 'cumulative tensions and frustrations' (Aziz 2019, np). Aziz went on to say that Bouteflika's fifth mandate was a mere catalyst in this process (2019, np), which became evident when the *hirakistes* continued protesting after the president's resignation, chanting *les généraux à la poubelle wal djazaïr teddi l'istiqlal,* or 'throw the generals in the bin, Algeria will take its independence' (for an example of this chant, see Liberte Algerie [sic] 2019). To call the protests an 'awakening' oversimplifies reality. It glosses over the Black Decade (1991-2002), a period of civil war that shook the country only twenty years ago, the memory of which still pervades society

today (Mellah 2020, p.138). It ignores demonstrations that have taken place since then, including the Black Spring in Kabylia in the early 2000s, as well as unrest from 2010, during the so-called 'Arab Spring' that took various forms across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.[2] The awakening narrative also ignores the opposition that arose in 2014 to Bouteflika's announcement of a fourth term as president. It also bizarrely suggests that most Algerian people were ignorant to politics and unphased by corruption one day, then suddenly 'woke up' and became activists the next. Benderra et al. (2020) write that unlike many foreign observers, most people in Algeria know the political system very well, which is evidenced by the protesters' determination to continue every week, even in the face of repression (p.53). The sheer scale of the protests may have been a surprise, particularly to foreign observers, certainly, but they did not emerge from thin air. From my observations, the 'awakening' narrative is especially prevalent in English-language media. It is also somewhat present in French language media, although in some cases it was described with a more fitting metaphor, 'le réveil du volcan algérien' (Metref 2019, np), which does a better job at encapsulating the inevitability and cumulative tension rather than suggesting the protests came from nowhere.

As well as being erroneously labelled an 'awakening', perceptions of the protests were also tainted by memories of the Black Decade. Violent uprisings in other countries in the MENA region, namely Syria, also informed these harmful stereotypes. Paul Silverstein wrote about the French media's tendency to associate Algeria (and majority Algerian neighbourhoods in France) with 'sectarian violence and terrorism', due in part to the civil war (Silverstein 2004, p.7). This is a stereotype that still holds weight today, exemplified by the surprise expressed by many in France that Algerian protesters were 'giving a lesson' in pacifism to the French *Gilets Jaunes* protesters: 'sur les réseaux sociaux, l'on s'émeut ou l'on s'étonne ou l'on s'offusque de voir les manifestants algériens donner des leçons de civilité aux Gilets Jaunes' (Guemriche 2019, p.56).[3] A defining feature of the Hirak is its overwhelmingly pacifist nature, and surprise or offence at this fact reveals a thinly veiled assumption that Algerians are violent by

[2] While Algeria was widely viewed to have been unaffected by the 2011 uprisings that began in neighbouring Tunisia (perhaps because they did not topple a dictator or fall into a civil war) there was some unrest and 'socio-political life was affected in ways that helped shape the dynamics of current dissent and protest' (Aziz 2019, np).

[3] The same sentiment appeared in the French media. For an example, see Micoine (2019).

nature. Furthermore, the comparison to France and surprise that it could possibly take lessons from the Algerians rests on old racist colonial tropes that suggest the French are a 'more civilised' people. However, the suggestion that the Hirak could descend into violent chaos did not only come from outside the country. Images of protesters offering flowers to police officers appeared, which prompted former prime minister Ahmed Ouyahia to commend the pacifist nature up until that point, but he then followed with a warning: 'we should recall that in Syria it also started with roses' (2019, quoted in translation in Ghimrasah 2019, np). The regime has a history of inciting fear to keep its opponents quiet. Zeraoulia (2020) links Ouyahia's ominous comments to previous attempts to instil panic in the hearts of Algerians: in September 2018, 'shocking and horrifying' images of victims from the Black Decade were broadcasted nationally to 'terrify people and to emphasise the role of President Bouteflika in the peace process' (p. 26).

The third chapter of this project, which focuses on music videos released in support of the Hirak, deals with another misguided perception of the movement alongside those outlined above. It explores the ways that music videos, especially those circulating online, can create stereotypes as well as challenging them. I have observed a tendency in French and British media to see certain songs trending on the internet and rush to label the songs or their singers 'anthems' or 'icons' of the Hirak respectively (BBC 2019; Brut 2020; Poussel 2019; Touati 2019), when this is far from the reality. Furthermore, popular music videos tend to be focused heavily on the north of the country and fail to recognise those who inhabit the Sahara, symptomatic of the south of the country being frequently othered as a 'distant and foreign space to most Algerians who in fact live closer to Paris than their own southern border' (Langlois 2017, p.179). This is a particular issue for songs that have been created with the intention to promote unity and diversity.

1.3 Literature Review

This dissertation contributes to an established body of work on the various forms of artistic expression that have provided alternative readings of Algerian politics and society since independence from France in 1962. It also asserts itself amongst work on the role of art and music in protest generally, as well as a growing body of scholarship on the impact of social media platforms on the production and reception

of artworks shared within their parameters. In 2007, the curator and art critic Nadira Laggoune-Aklouche wrote that after independence, art in Algeria took on an inescapably political flavour as exhibition spaces and art schools were re-appropriated by Algerians after being occupied by the French for so long (2019 [2007], pp.59-60). The *Union des Arts Plastiques* (now *Union des Arts Culturels*) was created in 1962 with the aim to create art that contributed to the national identity, but ultimately the complexities of political opinion and expression could not be contained within one structure, as conflicts arose between those who believed 'politically engaged art' must represent the War of Independence, and those who did not (Laggoune-Aklouche 2019 [2007], p.63). Laggoune-Aklouche argued that the UNAC must reconsider its purpose in order to grow and change with the progression of identity and politics over time (2019 [2007], p.64). Today, in the context of the Hirak, there is no doubt that politically engaged art has transformed over time, not only in terms of aesthetics and modes of exhibition, but also in the themes it expresses. It would be deceptive to ignore contemporary artistic critiques of the actual independent Algerian state in favour of a blinkered focus on the glory of the War of Independence and nationalist sentiment that comes with it.

Indeed, even by the 1990s events had sufficiently escalated for the focus of politically engaged art to shift dramatically. Creative engagements with the Black Decade were crucial in avoiding overarching narratives that always seemed to be in conflict and did more to obscure reality than offer any clarity. Jane Hiddleston writes about influential author Assia Djebar's 1995 novel *le Blanc de l'Algérie* which deals with the political climate at the beginning of this period. She argues that the book reveals the complexities and atrocities that official discourses tried to hide away, that it pushes for a plural understanding of events, against singular and linear narratives, towards 'alternative forms of commemoration' (Hiddleston 2005, p.18). Karim Ouaras writes about how political graffiti has long been a way for Algerians to express their political sentiments and dissent, from the War of Independence, through the Black Decade and to the present day (Ouaras 2018). Rana Jarbou (2011), although writing about the Arab Uprisings of 2011 onwards, argues that 'accessibility is at the heart of the medium' of graffiti as protest (p.44). This outlines the need to look beyond the traditional spaces for viewing or experiencing art forms when searching for multiple and nuanced perspectives.

Similarly, Fanny Gillet (2017) argues that Algerian art that refers to the past is not confined to particular narratives in the way the media or state discourse are, but rather it is informed by the 'present moment of artistic creation' (pp. 156-8). Artwork produced in this context does not have to be direct political activism, but rather a reflection of the perspective and lived reality of the creator at that moment in time. As one artist said to Gillet during her fieldwork: in Algeria, 'créer est déjà un engagement' (2017, p.158). In another article from 2013 regarding artistic production in Algeria during the so-called Arab Spring, Gillet argues that the new ideas brought forward in this period and the impact they had within Algeria's specific context 'show the complexity of the shapes and trajectories of artistic creation in a political moment' (2019 [2013], p.94). Gillet recognises the sometimes 'demagogic' status held by the War of Independence in Algerian art, as well as the current generation's tendency to refer to imagery of the Black Decade instead, and how these events and the specific conditions that surround them led to the denunciation of an opaque 'system', rather than a figurehead as was the case in other countries such as Tunisia (2019 [2013], p.94). In comparison to these other countries who toppled their ruling regimes and made international headlines, Algeria was relatively quiet during this time. However, the assumption that it should have followed suit 'appears to rest on the premise that all Arab societies want the same thing', which is certainly a reductive and flawed logic (McAllister 2013, p.3). It is important to view Algeria and its cultural production in context in this way, as it is when such political moments are taken out of context that reductive narratives begin to arise, such as labelling the Hirak an 'awakening'. The Hirak and the creative expressions that surround it are similarly underpinned by (several, interconnected) memories of the War of Independence and the Black Decade, as well as memories of the Arab Spring and other similar moments of disruption.

In her discussion of Oussema Troudi's *Deux Minutes de Tunis* (a video art project which offers a nuanced perspective of the 2011 Tunisian Revolution), Shilton (2016) writes that artistic production is crucial to the process of encouraging alternative readings of complex political situations. An analysis of Troudi's work shows a new way of looking at the Revolution, as it avoids icons and stereotypes through aesthetic elements such as contingency, 'encouraging viewers to reshape their memories of it [the Revolution] and indeed to imagine alternative futures for Tunisia' (Shilton 2016, p.75). Art and

music that engages with the Algerian Hirak is similarly vital to the creation of nuanced visions of the movement that go beyond the perceptions outlined above. Creative expressions shared online are particularly important in this regard as they become internationally available and exist within the same space in which the reductive narratives discussed above are being perpetuated (such as the description of the Hirak as a political 'awakening', or musicians as 'icons' of the Hirak by online news channels). The particularities of the social media platforms and the ways individuals interact within their parameters are just as vital to the process of exceeding stereotypes as the art itself.

MacDowall and De Souza's (2018) analysis of the influence of Instagram in graffiti practices and culture outlines the significant effect sharing photographs of artwork within this space has on the size of the audience, the ephemerality of the piece and audience feedback (pp.5-10). Edward King (2018) also writes that online platforms transform street art viewing practices, as the audience no longer have a 'local embodied experience' (p.227). This does not have to be limited to street art practices, either: the transition from traditional gallery space to the cyberspace similarly changes the function and the experience of an art piece. It is understood, therefore, that the artwork is transformed when it enters the cyberspace, to be viewed and analysed according to the specific conditions imposed upon it by the social media platform. Furthermore, artists are aware of this influence. In their discussion of the role of mobile and screen media in the connections between art, politics, and the environment in the Asia-Pacific, Hjorth et al. (2016) argue that visual artists in the region are increasingly incorporating mobile media into their art practices, particularly camera phone apps like Instagram. They write that platforms such as this encourage a 'democratization of media', blurring the lines between amateur and professional and increasing audiences' participation in the work or the issues it expresses (pp. 73-79). Artwork is experienced more intimately as the apps are user-oriented and generate a feeling of 'digital copresence' with other users, which includes the artists themselves (Hjorth et al. 2016, p. 86). When looking at art posted online that relates to the Hirak, it is necessary to consider how these viewing conditions can affect perceptions of the work and its message.

YouTube, too, has a 'flourishing participatory culture' that reveals itself in the comments section below music videos, where users interpret the videos 'both musically and aurally' and reveal a wider social

context wherein videos are experienced and shared with friends and family (Schneider 2016 pp.112-3). Vernallis (2013) draws on Overy and Molnar Szakacs' idea that music is a 'social activity' that creates a feeling of togetherness between the listener and performer (Overy and Molnar Szakacs 2009, p.499). She believes that music video takes this even further as it 'directs' the viewer's feelings, and they project their own understanding of the body onto the performing body/bodies in the video. It is a firm interpersonal experience held together by the music track (Vernallis, 2013, pp.159-160). Reaction videos (in which an individual or group of individuals film themselves reacting to a given item, video or song) take this further still, as they presuppose that music will have a visible effect on the body of the listener, which is then shared with other listeners and communities are formed around 'counter-hegemonic listening practices' (McDaniel 2020, p.15). When shared in the online space where such interactions and interpretations are visible, the music video takes on a new life as it is experienced in a more complex participatory and informative environment than if it were viewed on the television, for example. This is especially relevant for protest music in the online space. Jenzen et al. (2020) write that during the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, protest music videos made use of the audiovisual to challenge dominant media narratives and emotively communicate reasons for unrest, as well as exposing the local protest to wider audiences through the online platform. This can also be applied to the Algerian context, although Jenzen et al. do not address the potential for music videos to contribute to simplistic media narratives around protest as well as challenging them.

The recent history of music in Algeria also reveals a tendency to use this creative form to subvert official narratives. Rai music emerged in the early to mid-20th century and remains hugely popular today. Noor Al-Deen (2005) links rai to rap and reggae music in the ways it 'has become a form of social protest and cultural expression for voicing frustrations' (p.609). Benrabah (1999) writes about the importance of Rai's translation to 'opinion' or 'way of life', and that in many ways it contested the regime and the ways that young people were expected to live (p.32). According to Langlois (2017), music reveals the complex cultural realities that fail to be contained by the dominant discourse around nationhood and what it means to be Algerian. Rai was contentious for its raunchy themes and use of Darija in the 20th Century. Traditional Amazigh music practices have been important in expressing non-arabness amongst

Imazighen, and Kabyle activist music by musicians such as Ferhat Mehenni, Lounis Ait Menguellet and Lounes Matoub has been central to the Kabyle cause for self-determination (Langlois 2017, p.176). Algerian rap music from the 90s and early 2000s is also relevant. Chauvin (2018) writes that rap music is key to understanding the problems faced by young people because of the country's political situation (p.118). Similarly, Mouffokes and Boumedini (2017) conclude that rappers speak out about issues that affect the masses, such as injustice, nepotism, and corruption, and they do so by using everyday language (p.53). Protest music relating to the Hirak today often takes inspiration from rap, likely for the same reasons observed by Jenzen et al. in the Gezi Park protests: activists draw on 'pre-existing popular culture notions of an authentic political voice, such as the association of rap music with social protest' (2020, p.213).

1.4 Theoretical Framework & Methodology

In this thesis, I draw on and combine two theories: Edouard Glissant's notion of *opacité* from the field of postcolonial studies, and the idea of the 'cyberself' developed from Symbolic Interactionist theory. Opacity rejects the human tendency to categorise the 'Other' according to simple transparencies. It is, according to Glissant, an irreducible diversity to which we all have a right: 'je réclame pour tous le droit à l'opacité. Il ne m'est plus nécessaire de "comprendre" l'autre, c'est-à-dire de le réduire au modèle de ma propre transparence, pour vivre avec cet autre ou construire avec lui' (Glissant 1996, pp.71-2). Although Glissant was writing within the context of postcolonial Martinique, this idea that one does not need to categorise people according to one's own perspective to appreciate them and move forward together can be extracted and adapted to different contexts. Indeed, opacity has already been applied elsewhere, particularly within the fields of art history and film studies: from queer theory and art practices (de Villiers 2012; Blas 2016) to Franco-Maghrebi art (Shilton 2013), art in the Tunisian Revolution (Shilton 2016), and film focusing on Palestinian refugees (Demos 2009). It can also be used to identify the ways that Algerian artists and musicians involved in protest avoid the simplistic representations of the movement outlined in section 1.2. Glissant recognises that as humans we tend to impose our own transparencies on the world and asserts that claiming the right to opacity is a way of resisting this: 'c'est pourtant renoncer à ramener les vérités de l'étendue à la mesure d'une seule

transparence, qui serait mienne, que j'imposerais' (Glissant 2009, p.69). While Glissant claims opacity 'pour tous', the theory is bound up with the realities of power imbalance, and serves as a tool for dismantling hierarchies, privileging instead 'networks that abolish the primacy of any one centre of understanding' (Crowley 2006, p.107). This is pertinent in the context of the Hirak, as the movement itself is a network of various interconnected, and at times opposing, worldviews, ideologies, experiences, and events. Glissant's belief that not even an individual person can be reduced to transparencies reveals the extent of the Hirak's complexity as a collective movement. Understanding it through the lens of opacity therefore prompts us to consider alternative modes of representing the protests that take into account the obscure and the obvious: 'L'opacité accueille et recueille le mystère et l'évidence de toutes les poétiques, c'est-à-dire de tous les détails des lieux du monde, sans les offusquer jamais et sans tenter de les réduire à l'unité' (Glissant 2009, p.70). The 'mystère' is, essentially, unrepresentable, but creative expression can provide a multi-layered perspective that points to more beyond itself, privileging multiplicity over taking one perspective and labelling it truth. Particularly when viewed online, artwork can act as an access point to an endless stream of information that reveals nothing but complexity, as I expand upon in this thesis. This is encapsulated by Glissant's metaphor of the landscape that is endlessly obscure beneath that which is obvious: '*Pas un paysage qui ne soit obscur, sous ses plaisantes transparences, quand vous lui parlez infiniment'* (Glissant 2009, p.71; emphasis in original).

The literature reviewed above by Laggoune-Aklouche (2019 [2007]), Gillet (2017; 2019 [2013]), and Hiddleston (2005), reveals the ways that Algerian art has already served to promote complexity in the face of simplistic narratives surrounding political events since independence from France in 1962. While they do not mention Glissant specifically, they illustrate a similar sentiment to the one that I develop here: artistic production will always reimagine itself as time passes and new events unfold, and thus cannot be restricted to one event or timeframe in an attempt to legitimise transparent narratives such as glorifying one perspective on the War for Independence (Laggoune-Aklouche 2019 [2007]); the complexities of each person's lived reality in relation to a nationwide event go far beyond any official discourse, and creative expression provides alternative and plural ways of seeing these events

(Hiddleston 2005; Gillet 2017; 2019 [2013]). The reductive perceptions of the Hirak that I discussed earlier in section 1.2 show that the oversimplification of Algeria's complexities is still prevalent. Shilton (2016) uses Glissant to illustrate how Oussema Troudi's video artwork 'encourages understanding [of the Tunisian Revolution] while protecting opacity', while acknowledging that there is a disparity of experience between viewers (p. 71). While this deals with a different context to the Algerian one analysed here, it shows how artwork can shed some light on a protest movement, while also maintaining its irreducible diversity. If everyone has a right to opacity, as Glissant says, then a collective movement such as the Tunisian Revolution or the Algerian Hirak, formed of thousands, even millions, of individuals, can never be neatly pinned down. Therefore, art and music that engage with protest and politics frequently challenge simplistic perceptions, but do not give a definitive answer. They do not, for the most part, respond to an accusation of transparency (such as the assumption the Hirak would become violent) with another, alternative transparency, but point instead towards multiple, interconnected narratives, memories, and experiences, which will be interpreted differently by different viewers. The curator Natasha Marie Llorens (2019) summed it up well when she facilitated an exhibition entitled *Waiting for Omar Gatlato* in 2019, with the aim to 'respond to the impossibility of representing Algeria with the conviction that it is necessary to face the task as an impossibility and act in spite of that fact' (p. 16).

The second theory underpinning this thesis is a symbolic interactionist understanding of the 'cyberself' in the online space and how this affects art practices and experience. Symbolic Interactionism is a sociological theory concerned with how society is formed through interactions between individuals. The theory covers many aspects of society and human interaction, but what I am concerned with here is the individual's creation of the 'self' through a series of expressions and symbols curated with the intention to be perceived in a certain way by the 'other'. Sociologist Erving Goffman explained that the 'self' is constructed through expressions intentionally *given* and is also defined by those unintentionally *given off* (Goffman 1959, p.3, emphasis in original). Essentially, this means that humans behave in a certain way according to how we want others to perceive us, and sometimes we accidentally give off additional expressions that may go against the image we are trying to portray. Goffman's ideas follow

on from Mead (1934) who, similarly, writes that it is the process of the 'I' creating and responding to a 'me', the object of others' interpretation, that comprises the 'self'. The 'I', which is hidden and opaque, sees the 'me' as an object viewed by an external other, and so responds to and adapts the 'me' according to the perceived social requirements (pp.173-8). Robinson (2007) takes these ideas outlined by Mead and Goffman and applies them to the cyberspace. Rejecting assertions that online interactions challenge symbolic interactionism, Robinson finds that people are keen to recreate their offline selves in the online world and the process is similar, albeit with new ways of producing symbols. Using the example of online blogs, she writes: 'In Goffmanian terms, the 'I' constructs the homepage with expressions given by choosing text, photos, and digital formatting with the other's reaction in mind. The 'I' solicits the other's gaze through links to email, tabs to post comments, hit counters, and membership in webrings. Each of these indicate the 'I's' expectation of the other's presence and eventual appraisal. Once the 'I' perceives the cyberother's reaction, this reflexive constitution produces the 'cyberme'' (Robinson 2007, p.104). In more modern terms relevant to this study, every addition to one's Instagram profile or YouTube channel, every personal post, every account followed and every post liked or shared, becomes part of the creation of this cyberself, which exists to be perceived and is made legitimate as 'cyberothers' react.

Applying Robinson's idea of the cyberself to interactions with art and music in the online space reveals the ways that viewing practices and creative processes have dramatically changed in recent years. The connections between artist, artwork and audience are pulled together more tightly, and viewing and reacting to artwork becomes a more intimate activity bound up with one's expression of self. In the cyberspace, every action is made with the intention to be seen, therefore even 'liking' a photograph on Instagram has implications for the cyberself. Choosing to follow an artist, or to like or comment on their work, is to consent to that work becoming part of the fabric of one's cyberself to be perceived by others. The literature reviewed above can help to understand the specificity of viewing art online. Hjorth et al.'s (2017) observation that apps such as Instagram encourage a 'democratisation of media' (p. 76) is in line with the symbolic interactionist theory as art is deemed worthy of being seen according to numbers of likes and followers. The participatory culture of comments sections and reaction videos on

YouTube provide a further layer to the experience of music (Schneider 2016; McDaniel 2020). Furthermore, the idea of 'digital copresence' between users (Hjorth et al. 2017, p.79), specifically artist and viewer, brings them closer together if they are both understood as distinct cyberselves. The artist is present in the curation of their profile, the posts they like and the comments they write. Therefore, for those who hold simplistic perceptions of the Hirak (understood as a collective movement of individuals), having personal access to the expressions of other users, as well as the artistic expression and [cyber]self-expression of artists who engage with the movement, indeed sharing the cyberspace with them, can help to break stereotypes down in favour of opacity. It provides endless new perspectives, even opposing perspectives, revealing the impossibility of describing the complexity of the movement in simple terms. To recall Glissant's metaphor mentioned earlier ('*pas un paysage qui ne soit obscur...'*), similarly no protest movement is transparent beneath its apparent simplicity when you 'speak to it endlessly'. Exploring creative expression and seeing various perspectives in the online space allows us to do this, going beyond simple narratives such as understanding the Hirak as an 'awakening', privileging instead an understanding that takes into account that there is always more beyond what we think we know.

This study is also underpinned by a philosophical position that leaves behind the desire to seek unshakeable truths. There is no simple way of explaining the complexities of the Hirak, the set of conditions that preceded it, nor the various effects it has on the work of the many artists that belong to it. Nietzsche criticised the metaphysicians' belief in the opposition of values and all-too-hasty declaration of truth, preferring instead to suggest that the basis upon which knowledge was acquired may be 'no more than foreground evaluations, temporary perspectives, viewed from out of a corner perhaps, or up from underneath, a perspective from below' (Nietzsche 2008 [1886], p.6). He was clearly not talking about art and politics, but this idea can be adapted to illustrate the present Algerian situation. Simplistic media narratives, or any narrative that seeks to pin the events down and fit them neatly in a box, declaring them as 'truth', fails to acknowledge a multitude of other perspectives that contradict and discredit them. To recall an earlier example, while media outlets labelled the Hirak an 'awakening', there is plenty of evidence to suggest this is not the case (Aziz 2019). While it may have been a moment

of political awakening for some, others had already been engaged for years, something that is evident in many of the artists' work I examine in this thesis. However, as already discussed, art that refers to the past or to political events is informed by the 'present moment of artistic creation' (Gillet 2017, pp.156-8). It too does not offer a coherent and all-encompassing narrative. There will always be people, *hirakistes* and Algerians generally, who will feel entirely unrepresented by one or all the works discussed here, and there will be others who resonate with it. It remains necessary to 'relinquish [the] desire to know, in order to find some other mode of encounter with the art […] presented', to borrow Llorens' phrase (Llorens 2019, p.16). Overall, I have not set out here to provide an all-encompassing, monolithic absolute truth about the events of 2019-2020, but rather to explore various perspectives to contribute to a more nuanced, irreducibly diverse understanding of the Hirak.

As I am a European researcher in a British University, there have been some limitations to this study. I was not able to visit Algeria and correspondence with artists and supporters of the protests had to be done virtually. Only being able to speak English and French and relying on online information also meant that I had to keep updated on the events using the same sources that I know to be spreading reductive, and sometimes false, information. To help combat this limitation, I used all, albeit limited, resources available to gain a basic knowledge of Algerian Darija, I ensured I was in regular dialogue with Algerian people (inside and outside the country), and I spent time in Algerian social spaces online in order to hear from as many different perspectives as I could. It was in doing this early on that I identified the artists and musicians whose work I analyse in this thesis, who were all chosen for their significant online following and diverse ways of engaging with the movement. I chose to approach their work by analysing artistic, lyrical and audiovisual techniques in combination with additional features provided by the Instagram and YouTube platforms.

French as a second language has been hugely beneficial to this study, but I could not ignore works, particularly music, that use Algerian Darija. I chose to include one song in Darija, one in French and one which contains a mixture of Darija, French, Kabyle and Chenoua (the latter two being indigenous Tamazight varieties). I took an Arabic course alongside my studies which allowed me to transcribe the Darija song lyrics from Arabic script into the Latin alphabet (for formatting purposes and ease of access

for the non-Arabic speaking reader). I then found translations for the songs online and worked to the best of my abilities to understand the structures and meanings of the original songs. I also came across several phrases and words that were specific to the Hirak and adapted the translations accordingly to reflect these specific contextual meanings that are not just poetic license but elements of real chants and protesters' discourse.[4] I am very grateful to Souhila Belabbas, a PhD student at Southampton University and native speaker of Algerian Darija and Kabyle, for proofreading my transcriptions and translations.

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

The first chapter of the thesis deals with visual arts published primarily on Instagram. It looks first at the ongoing photography series *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* (2015 - present) by Ahmed Ait Issad, a collection of images that offer multiple, diverse depictions of Algerian society and protest that exceed simple media portrayals of the country. He promotes opacity through multiple scenarios and the peripatetic mode. Ait Issad challenges the perception of Algerians as 'violent' using colour and contrast, regularly entering the frame himself and photographing people from low angles, which reduces power imbalance and promotes interpersonal connection. He communicates an understanding of politics and society that predates the Hirak and is available to be viewed alongside present-day images of protest. The study then moves on to Merine Hadj Abderrahmane's project *La Main du Peuple* (2015 – present). It focuses on his street art interventions and argues that the artist counters the idea of the Hirak as an 'awakening' by continuing historical practices of writing political graffiti, and by reuploading his older works to the Instagram space within the context of the Hirak, asserting their significance in this time. He guards opacity by communicating with a hand-like character, rather than through verbal graffiti and the linguistic conflicts that can come with it. *La Main du Peuple* is a representation of the Algerian people that expresses hope for the future and belief in their capacity to affect change in a non-violent way. The work becomes new in the cyberspace, trading physical, in situ experience for digital interaction.

The second and final chapter focuses on music videos on YouTube. It covers *Allo le Système !* (2019) by Raja Meziane, a rap song delivered in Darija. I analyse Meziane's use of sound and lyrical metaphor

[4] This was aided largely by Jadaliyya's Hirak glossary parts one and two (Haleh Davis et al. 2019; Ghorabi 2020).

to evoke a feeling of tension building up, that counteracts the image of the Hirak as an 'awakening'. Meziane also continues a tradition of political engagement in Algerian rap music. She promotes an understanding that the Hirak expands beyond herself and what she represents, by borrowing iconic phrases from the protests and featuring images of the protests. Reaction videos, borne out of a complex network of interactions stemming from the original video, reveal how the song affects the emotions and encourages movement. The chapter then moves onto *Liberté* (2019) by Soolking, a slow-paced, melodic rap song in French that offers a less direct engagement with the movement, promoting opacity by refusing to impose a particular narrative beyond a desire for freedom. Soolking similarly uses verbal metaphor to reject the 'awakening' stereotype, and points to the influence of football culture in the Hirak by featuring the group Ouled el Bahdja in the song. Perhaps the most striking feature of the song is its expression of peace and rejection of violence throughout the music track. Furthermore, here I find that reaction videos reveal the disparity of experience between different viewers, but comments sections allow for additional information to be shared publicly and varying viewpoints to be expressed. The chapter concludes with *Libérez l'Algérie* (2019) by various artists, an upbeat pop song in Darija, French, Kabyle and Chenoua. The song also expresses a commitment to pacifism, the effect of which is visible in reaction videos. This section finds that diversity of language is important in protecting opacity and the inclusion of several people in the video simulates a moment of protest, signalling several perspectives. However, in its aim to represent diversity there are some crucial aspects missing. Overall, these works serve to counter the simplistic perceptions of the Hirak discussed above in various, overlapping ways, and on occasion can contribute to the creation of stereotypes.

2. Chapter One: Photography and Street Art on Instagram

Since its launch in 2010, the popular photo-sharing website Instagram has grown rapidly, surpassing one billion monthly active users in 2018 (see Dhillon 2018, np). It offers user-friendly access to a massive international audience and a stream of diverse visual cultures. It is understandable, then, why artists across the world take to the platform to share their work and engage in this near-global community. As Hjorth et al. (2016) argue, digital platforms are 'becoming part of the ways in which artists connect with both the world and the people and nonhumans in it' (p. 73). Therefore, as the internet becomes increasingly present in daily life, artists are taking advantage of platforms like Instagram and incorporating them into their work. This allows them to engage with their audiences in alternative ways, building a virtual environment where art and the issues it expresses are more intimately involved in people's lives. For Algerian artists whose work engages with the Hirak, Instagram is a useful tool for interacting with their audience, visualising protest on the 'global' stage and exposing Algerian artwork to an international audience. This is not to say that the artwork in question exists solely for a foreign audience, or even that it was created with such an intention; however, according to the social media analytics website NapoleonCat (2019a, 2019b), Instagram is used by only 10% of the Algerian population, which when compared to the widespread usage of Facebook (estimated to be 50% of the population), does indicate that artists publish their work on Instagram to reach beyond a solely Algerian audience (see **Figure 1**).

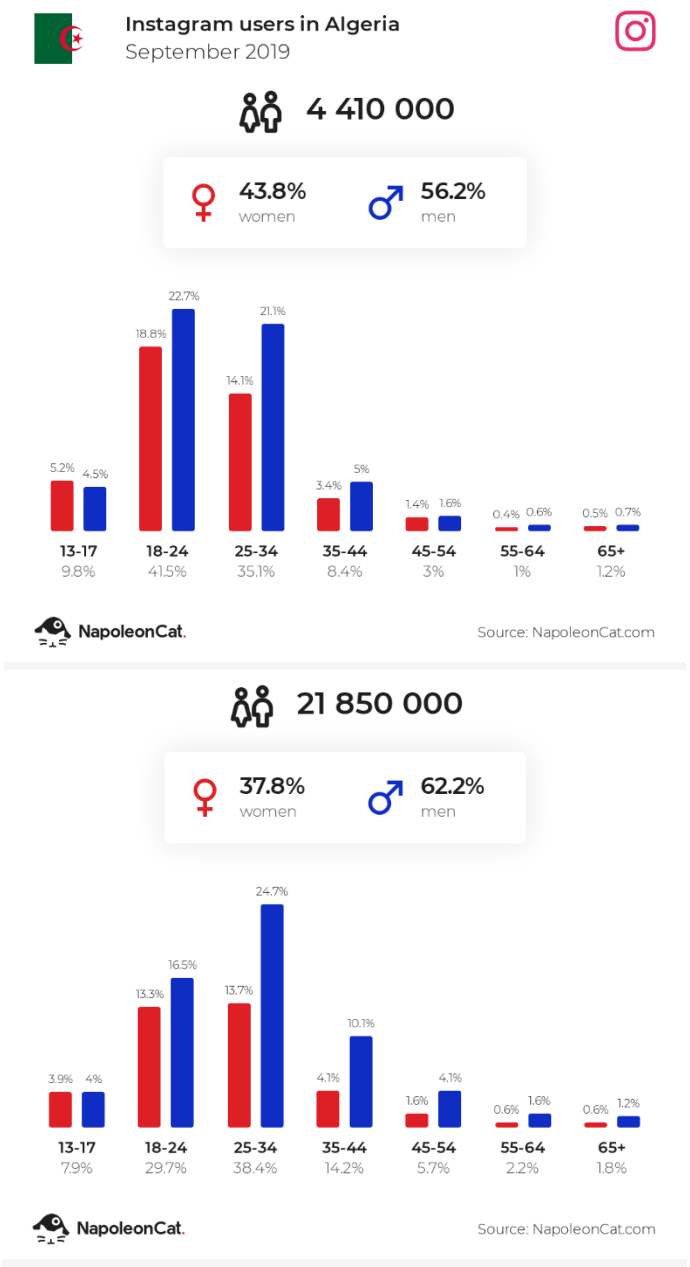

Figure 1: *Graph of Instagram and Facebook users in Algeria (NapoleonCat 2019a; 2019b).*

To explore the complex role Instagram plays in the dissemination, creation and experience of art related to the Hirak, the following pages will focus on two Algerian visual artists who exhibit their work on the platform: photographer Ahmed Ait Issad (@algerievuedenbas) and street artist Merine Hadj Abderrahmane (@lamaindupeuple2). These artists have been chosen for their significant online following and their engagement with the Hirak in various, overlapping ways, as they each employ different artistic styles to both interrogate Algerian society and promote an image of the country that is

in opposition to the damaging stereotypes outlined earlier. Therefore, this thesis will ask how the work of these young artists evokes the Hirak and encourages audiences to think differently about Algeria.[5] What are the similarities and differences between the potential impact of photography and street art in their digitised forms? How is Instagram used to engage audiences? What are the advantages and limitations of the Instagram architecture? What is the impact of the loss or gain of experiential elements?

2.1 *Algérie Vue d'en Bas*

Of the three artistic projects, Ahmed Ait Issad's photographic series *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* could be considered the most explicit in its treatment of Algerian society and the Hirak. Ait Issad started the project with a vision to counter reductive media representations of his country, as he explained to France 24 in 2018: 'Il faut que les médias arrivent à raconter autre chose que des histoires qu'on entend depuis des années. Il faut montrer ce dynamisme, ces jeunes qui veulent travailler, avancer […] c'est cette richesse que j'essaie de montrer à travers mes photos' (France24, 2018). He also seeks to challenge misguided foreign perceptions that suggest Algerian people are 'stern' or 'unwelcoming', as he goes on to say: 'beaucoup pensent que l'algérien est dur. Il faut venir pour comprendre que l'algérien est très accueillant, très chaleureux' (France24 2018). The project, which is primarily exhibited online but has been shown at small venues in Oran, Laghouat and Paris, focuses on daily life and cultural activity in Algeria, showing a wide range of scenarios, people and places. Over time, the Hirak has come to feature heavily in *Algérie Vue d'en Bas*. The series is too large to analyse every photograph, so I will select some examples to discuss in detail with reference to the whole. It should be noted that the series features images of food as well as landscapes and street scenes, but my focus here is primarily the images that depict people. The photographs are not individually named but I will refer to them with a short description, the date of publication, and a figure reference.

The project's title was inspired by the documentary film *Algérie Vue du Ciel* (2015) by Yann Arthus-Bertrand and Yazid Tizi. Filmed entirely from an army helicopter, *Algérie Vue du Ciel* is a display of the vast and diverse landscapes and cities of Algeria: if the country had a booming tourism industry,

[5] These potential 'audiences' are plural as they are located across the world, with various levels of knowledge about the Algerian context and the languages used.

one could imagine its advertisements would look rather like this. The film is well known in the country, even being adapted for the music video for popular rapper L'Algerino's song *Algérie Mi Amor* (2019), and Ait Issad does not intend to criticise it. He prefers to lend equal importance to the Algeria 'from below', affirming that the country's humanity can be as beautiful as its landscapes: 'Si l'Algérie a des paysages magnifiques, c'est aussi un pays d'une grande richesse humaine' (interview with Boyer 2018, np). *Algérie Vue du Ciel* does feature people, but only from a great distance, removing any sense of intimacy or impression of real experience, whereas Ait Issad's photographs welcome the outsider in to be amongst the people, to humble him/herself and share in the simple act of being human: to relate to others despite potential cultural differences. It is a multifaceted and nuanced representation of the country, which is essential in the context of the Hirak, and points to opacity rather than transparency by constantly updating the story with new scenarios, leaving the viewer unsure of what will come next. Furthermore, the photographs' location within the Instagram cyberspace, Ait Issad's tendency to move in and out of the frame, and his use of the platform to encourage collaborative social action, signal the artist's digital presence and create an intimate participatory environment for cyberselves to interact.

Ait Issad has described himself as a 'conteur photographique' (France24 2018), with each photograph in the series not only telling its own story about the people or scenes it depicts, but also forming part of the story of the photographer's travels around the country. Scrolling between photographs on the display page reveals Ait Issad's travels from place to place. He uses a hand-held smartphone to take photographs easily and discreetly (19h info 2018), which results in spontaneous images, often of people suspended in acts of protest. His use of the peripatetic mode in this way is comparable to Franco-Algerian artist Katia Kameli's video work entitled *Bledi: a Possible Scenario* (2011 [2006]). With a hand-held camera, Kameli documents various scenes she comes across as she travels in Algeria (*bledi* meaning 'my country'), scenes prefaced by the words 'a possible scenario' in the title, which suggest this is but one collection of perspectives: there are more stories to tell and more scenarios possible. The film contains 'fragments of individual yet intersecting micronarratives' in the form of music, news reports and interviews conducted by the artist, which come together to disarm monolithic representations of the country (Shilton 2013, p.155). This points towards the type of unfathomable difference described by

Glissant in his discussion of opacity (Glissant, 1990, pp.204-9; Shilton 2013, p.148). *Algérie Vue d'en Bas*, too, features countless scenarios and perspectives woven together, encouraging a plural reading of Algerian society and protest. The diversity of the images and videos, exhibited together on the Instagram page, make it impossible to choose one and declare that it encapsulates all.

Ait Issad's use of the 'location' feature on Instagram furthers the allusion to diversity that can never be pinned down and demonstrates the role Instagram's participatory culture plays in the experience of the work. The feature allows him to tag a photograph to a location, which will then appear as a link at the top of the post (see **Figure 2**, where the post has been tagged to 'Algiers, Algeria'). When this geotag is clicked, it will take the user to a page displaying three key features: the distance between the user's location and Algiers; a scrollable map of the area; and a collection of all the other public photographs tagged to the city (**Figure 2**: features 1, 2 and 3 respectively). The photograph is therefore available to be viewed alongside a never-ending stream of photographs taken in, and subsequently tagged to, Algiers – until there are so many new images tagged to that location that it is buried beneath them, although it remains a point of access to the Algiers location page. This removes some level of control the artist has over the narrative he is trying to promote, as he has no influence over what other people choose to publish and add to this photo pool. The viewers therefore encounter more, likely Algerian, cyberselves

and have access to narratives that are not conditioned by Ait Issad's personal biases, which further contributes to the opacity communicated by the project.

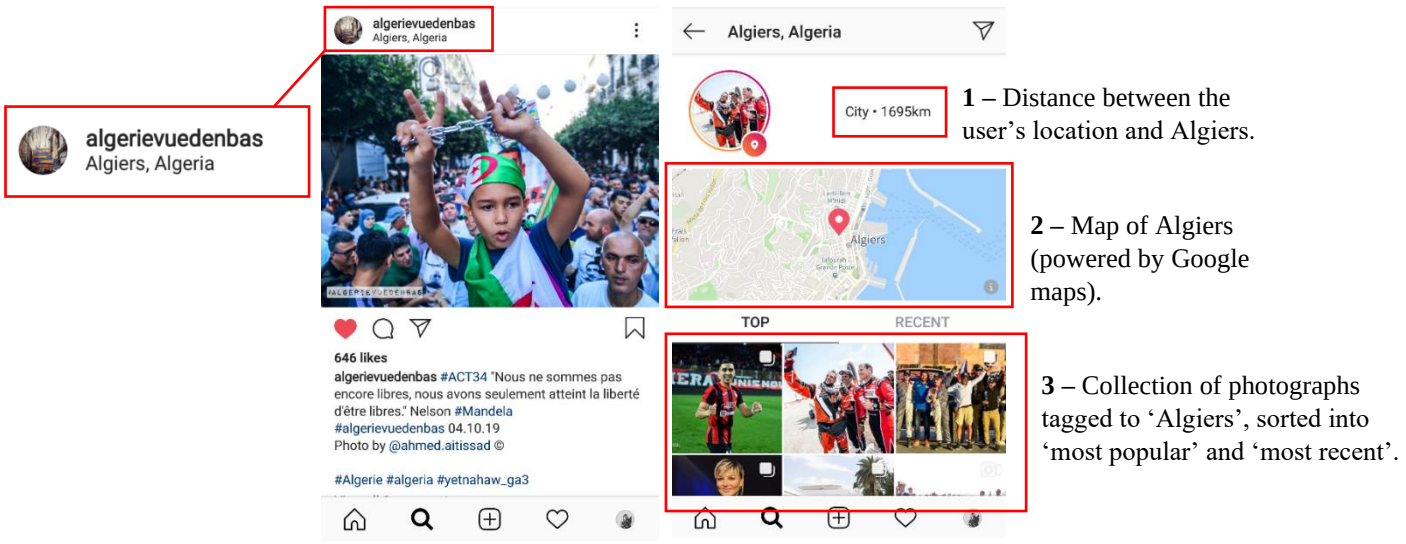

Figure 2: example of an Instagram geotag and location page for Algiers (Ait Issad 2019a)

In an article discussing georeferenced photographs on Flickr and Facebook, Erickson (2010) speculated that people might one day 'see physical space as containing access points, or portholes, to an ancillary database of information that they can access or contribute to via a mobile device'. (p. 394). Ten years later, Instagram is a worthy example of this 'ancillary database'. Each feature mentioned above provides information about the physical location, and the attached photo pool creates an impression of the place that is multifaceted as it is dynamic, updated throughout the day by residents and visitors alike. It can be said, then, that Instagram has changed the way its users see space, as the physical location becomes a 'porthole' to its digital representation in the Instagram cyberspace, which offers additional information and a multitude of alternative perspectives. When geo-referenced, Ait Issad's photographs are therefore not only representational in relation to one another, as a collection which claims to portray Algeria seen from below, but also contribute to the digital impressions of the places within Algeria that they depict. The artwork becomes part of something bigger, to be viewed by differently situated audiences with varying levels of knowledge about the area represented. The project's dynamic nature, and the access points to different photo pools that it contains, gives it an edge that Kameli's film does not have: the capacity to continuously update the story and leave the audience unsure about what will come next. Ait Issad regularly uploads new images and tags them to location photo pools which are also continuously

updated by various users. There is no time to form totalising conclusions before they are undone by a never-ending stream of new scenarios that are impossible to predict or confine to one narrative.

Therefore, when images of the Hirak naturally filtered into the series in February 2019, they were preceded by four years' worth of content that was already providing a counterpoint to the stereotypes that came to fuel limited perceptions of the movement. From its inception in 2015, *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* has been moving away from the past and optimistically looking forward to a better future. The personal, relaxed, and joyful content of a majority of the photographs counters the 'stern' and 'unwelcoming' image that Ait Issad wishes to dispute, which, as outlined in the introduction, is a stereotype that contributed to the assumption that the protests would be violent. Upon the first glance, the most noticeable feature of the project is its vibrant colour palette, as Ait Issad exploits the country's blue skies and beating sun to illuminate his subjects, symbolising optimism. A closer look at the pre-Hirak images therefore reveals a narrative into which the protests fit seamlessly, and their peaceful nature certainly does not come as a surprise.

Consider the two images posted on 12th March 2018, depicting supporters of the Mouloudia Club Oran (MCO) football team in Algiers on a match day (**Figure 3;** Ait Issad 2018a, 2018b). The subjects are captured in movement as they wave flags, chant, and clap in a joyful expression of loyalty to their team. Like many other depictions of people in the series, the photographs are taken from a low angle which reduces the power imbalance implied by far-removed, overhead shots such as those seen in *Algérie Vue du Ciel*. As a result, one meets the young men's gaze to be confronted by their humanity. With raised arms, mouths open and smiling, the men invite the viewer to share in a moment of their celebration. Ait Issad has made use of the cloudless blue sky as a backdrop which contrasts starkly with the red football shirts and scarves. The saturation of the images has been slightly increased to intensify these colours, which further communicates the vibrant and celebratory atmosphere. When discussing these images with France 24, Ait Issad noted that football in Algeria is often associated with violence and he wanted to show a different side to it to challenge the lack of nuance in dominant discourse (France24, 2018). The photographs certainly live up to this vision and challenge the violent image of Algerians generally

that is perpetuated in French media – as outlined by Silverstein (2004, p.7) and discussed in the introduction – which ultimately tainted perceptions of the Hirak.

Figure 3: Algérie Vue d'en Bas, *12th March 2018*

However, for those familiar with the team, the sight of the MCO jerseys in Ait Issad's images may remind them of the riots that broke out in Oran in 2008 after the team was relegated to the second division. Rival fans were involved and the demonstrators 'burned down banks, shopping malls, public administration buildings and bus stops' (Amara 2012, p.48). At face value, Ait Issad's photographs are, therefore, in no way a neutral or all-encompassing depiction of any section of society, whether it is football or, latterly, the Hirak. Indeed, as John Tagg (2003) writes, 'the camera is never neutral' (p. 259): all photography is informed by the intentions and beliefs of the photographer. Ait Issad has an agenda, but it is based on the belief that the 'negative' side of Algeria has been shown enough, and there is a need to highlight the 'positives' or, more importantly, the normal, everyday scenarios which attest to the humanity of the people depicted and break down the processes of transparent categorisation that focusing on violence engenders. In short, it is assumed that the audience is aware of the less than desirable aspects of football culture, in keeping with Victor Burgin's (2003) idea that every photograph is 'presupposed' by other related 'photographic texts' which do not appear in the photograph in question

but can be 'read across it symptomatically' (p. 131). This, along with the effect of the peripatetic mode, multiple scenarios and dynamism discussed above, alludes to a wider and more nuanced understanding that exceeds reductive narratives such as those that label the country 'violent' based on past events.

Furthermore, in many ways football violence is closely linked to state violence, and football culture has played a significant part in the Hirak, particularly in the form of songs and chants adopted by the protestors (Copa90 Stories 2019). The riots in Oran and other incidents like them were a product of the political climate at the time, with high unemployment rates and corruption being the norm (Amara 2012, p.48). Looking back at Ait Issad's photographs of the football supporters now in the context of the Hirak, these close ties between the political and the cultural can also be 'read across' the image, revealing a history of political awareness that presupposes the Hirak. Indeed, as the project progresses and the Hirak becomes a weekly feature, the influence of football culture is clear, which in turn influences the way the older photographs are viewed. For example, on 18th November 2019, Ait Issad used Instagram's IGTV feature to upload a long video of the 39th week of the protests, captioned 'Act 39: Vendredi anti mascarade electorale' (Ait Issad 2019b). The video is full of chants which originated in the football stadiums before the Hirak, such as Ouled El Bahdja's *La Casa del Mouradia* (2018) and *Ultima Verba* (2019).[6] While these connections between football and protest may have passed under the radar before the Hirak began, they are now in the public eye as the chants have moved from the confines of the stadiums to the streets. Their presence undermines the idea that the movement was an 'awakening', as political songs and chants have filled the stadiums for years prior, denouncing the same injustices the *hirakistes* are marching against today.[7] Rather than calling the protests an 'awakening' and separating the past from the present, it is important to interrogate such connections and look at the ways in which the present illuminates the past. *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* makes these connections visible; older images take on new meanings as events progress, new images shed light on older ones, continuously resisting transparency.

[6] Ouled El Bahdja are a group of supporters of the Algiers based team USM Alger. I discuss them further in the second chapter of this thesis.
[7] Amara (2012) discusses football chants prevalent at the time, which share many themes with the Hirak, notably clandestine emigration as a symptom of *Hogra* (state oppression or contempt).

Ait Issad's photographs of the protests continue the vibrant colour scheme of the series, signalling optimism. The images come somewhere between art and photojournalism, as the photographer welds artistic preferences that allude to meanings beyond the image, such as colour contrast, with a desire to document the events. This amalgamation of styles is somewhat typical of photojournalism generally, as outlined by Veneti (2017, pp.293-4), although Ait Issad is not working for a news organisation: the images serve to illustrate his narrative as an Algerian citizen and protester, rather than a media narrative. The photographer himself moves in and out of the frame, regularly signalling his position as an active participant in the protests, not a neutral observer. In an image posted on 9th March 2019, he can be seen elevated in front of a crowd of protesters (**Figure 4;** Ait Issad, 2019c). His arm is extended to take the 'selfie', allowing the extent of the crowd to be included in the frame. Frosh writes that selfies point to 'the performance of a communicative action rather than to an object, and [are] a trace of that performance' (2015, p.1610). Therefore, by including himself in the picture, Ait Issad is communicating his participation in the movement as one part of a collective whole, breaking down the imbalance of power between photographer and subject, documenter and documented. He also provides a face to his expression of self in the cyberspace, increasing the feeling of co-presence between artist and viewer and impeding the dehumanisation of Algerians that fuels the 'violent' stereotypes. His use of a smartphone facilitates these processes, as the modern device with a front and back camera is designed

to switch easily between fields and include the photographer in the depiction, bringing the space of production and the photographed image together (Frosh 2015, p.1612).

***Figure** 4:* Algérie Vue d'en Bas, *9th March 2019*

The artist's presence in the online space alongside his viewers allows for easy interaction between them, which can lead to collective social action in the physical world and audience participation in the artwork. The series engages with the Hirak in alternative ways that extend beyond typical images of protest (crowds, placards, flags, et cetera). Ait Issad takes advantage of his social media following to gather people together to meet at iconic locations to clear rubbish as part of a global 'Trashtag Challenge', photographing the results and publishing them to Instagram as part of the collection.[8] Young people cleaning the streets after the protests has been a symbolic feature of the Hirak, a metaphor for the people 'cleaning' the country of corruption: 'nous nettoyons la rue mais aussi le pays' (protestors quoted in Saadoun 2019, np). Ait Issad's initiative to take this a step further and clean locations around the capital comes hand in hand with the protest movement; indeed, it is a form of protest. The images provide a nuanced depiction of the issue: litter is a problem that exists, but there are also people who are willing to make a tangible difference. In this way, they challenge reductive narratives such as Kamel Daoud's

[8] It is believed the 'Trashtag Challenge' was started by the outdoor equipment company UCO Gear in 2015 and since went viral on social media (Nace 2019, np).

provocative article about litter in the *Quotidien d'Oran*, in which he wrote that most Algerians are 'dirty' and that if they were incapable of keeping the country clean, it may as well be given back to the colonisers (Daoud, 2014). As Serres and Leperlier (2017) write, Daoud's shocking language is reminiscent of the colonial period when Algerians were viewed as lesser by the French settlers (p.70). It is a product of the same neo-colonial ways of thinking that fuelled the reductive perceptions discussed throughout this study. Ait Issad's images certainly critique a section of society, but they look forward to a better Algerian future rather than to a bloody French past.

During the colonial period, postcard photography was the 'pseudoknowledge of the colony' that gave rise to stereotypes about Algeria (Alloula, 1986 [1981], p.4). The trashtag photographs in *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* juxtapose postcard-like images of iconic locations, which often happen to be colonial buildings, with the piles of rubbish collected. In one image, posted on 31st August 2019, the Notre-Dame d'Afrique in Algiers fills two-thirds of the frame against an almost-cloudless sky, a classic postcard image, were it not for the piles of rubbish bags in the foreground (**Figure 5;** Ait Issad, 2019d). Ait Issad incorporates both the iconic, promotional image and the less aesthetically pleasing into the frame. He is not presenting the viewer with a one-dimensional image posing as truth, as a postcard might, but rather a multi-layered representation of a location within Algeria that exists to simultaneously promote, critique, and encourage dialogue about the country. In the context of the Hirak, this is especially pertinent as Algerians come together to influence the course of history and begin to envisage how the future might look. Rather than perpetuating nostalgia for colonial stereotypes into the modern day, Ait Issad weaves the country's past into his narrative by featuring the 19th century French basilica, a subtle reference to colonial legacy without letting it define the present. The monument is presented as

a purely Algerian landmark, to be enjoyed by its citizens in Ait Issad's vision of a liberated, forward-looking society that serves the needs of its people.

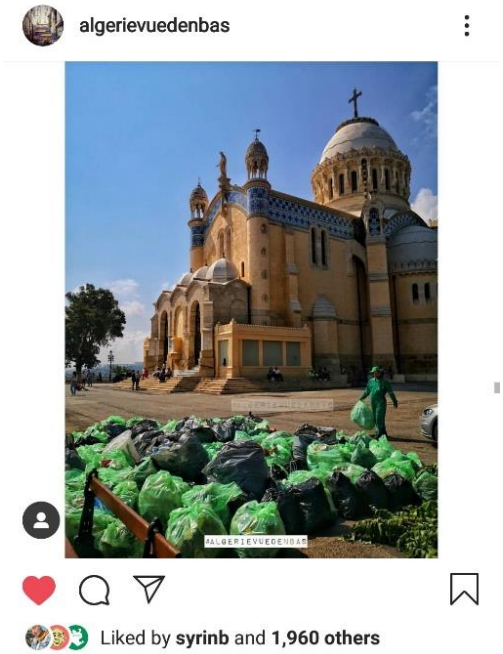

Figure 5: Algérie Vue d'en Bas, *31st August 2019*

Overall, the multiple narratives and ever-changing nature of the *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* series, aided by the Instagram platform and the formation of cyberselves, impedes the formation of harmful stereotypes around the country and the Hirak. The photographer uses colour contrast to communicate optimism and positivity in the face of a dominant discourse that often reduces Algeria to negative perceptions. He photographs people from a low angle and frequently enters the frame himself, reducing any imbalance of power and promoting grass-roots level perspectives. All these subversive tactics formed part of the project before and after the Hirak began, creating an environment where the peaceful and positive nature of the movement did not come as a surprise. As events unfold, new images can shed light on older ones and reveal a reality more complex than the 'awakening' narrative suggests. Finally, Ait Issad simultaneously critiques and promotes his country by engaging in waste collection as an alternative form of protest, while rejecting colonial nostalgia and promoting a belief in the Algerian people to effect change that is not held back by neo-colonial stereotypes. The following project that I will discuss, *La Main du Peuple*, similarly uses bright colours to symbolise optimism and critiques society while also

promoting ‘the people’ as actors of change. It does this in a more abstract way, however, through the symbolism of a hand pasted up onto walls around Algeria.

2.2 *La Main du Peuple*

Merine Hadj Abderrahmane is a visual artist from Sidi Bel Abbes in North-Western Algeria. He regularly publishes photographs of his work on Instagram, originally under the username @LaMainDuPeuple, until a cyber-attack resulted in his account being deleted, forcing him to start over as @LaMainDuPeuple2 in October 2019. He has engaged in performance art, digital art and exhibited artwork in galleries; however, this part of the thesis will focus specifically on his street art, as well as the role played by Instagram in the experience of them. It focuses on pieces which were created before the Hirak began but were republished in the cyberspace after the cyber-attack, asserting their relevance in the present context.

Politically charged graffiti and street art in Algeria are not a new phenomenon. During the War of Independence (1954-1962), members of both the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) and the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (OAS) used graffiti to render their message visible in the public space and spread their ideologies (Ouaras 2018, p.178). Graffiti also played a similar role in the so-called ‘Berber Spring’ in 1980, the Black Decade in the 1990s and during the 2001 uprisings in Kabylia (Ouaras 2018, pp.178-180). This form of public expression is distinguished from other graffiti styles by its ‘spontaneous’ nature, lacking a ‘certain calligraphic style’ (Snyder 2009, p.28). It is this kind of graffiti, a single line of political text sprayed on a wall, with varying levels of artistic flair, that Ouaras (2009) was discussing when he said ‘les murs d’Alger disent haut ce que la société pense bas’ (p.10). It can, however, also be applied to *La Main du Peuple*. Due to its political nature, Merine’s work clearly exists within a long history of creative activism in Algeria, countering the ‘awakening’ narrative, but it boasts a unique aesthetic that points to opacity as it brings various styles and concepts together, as well as privileging non-verbal communication.

In addition to drawing on the deep-rooted tradition of political graffiti, Merine borrows elements of the ‘writing culture’ that emerged in the USA in the 1960s. This style of writing on walls is thought to have

been brought to Algeria by a writer from Tizi Ouzou called *Harba* and his crew *AKM* (Touloum and Zebiri 2016, p.3). Often wrongly labelled as 'hip-hop graffiti', the style will be discussed here under the label 'writing culture', or 'graffiti writing', as advised by Gregory Snyder – because although the art form came to be closely associated with hip-hop, it existed before the hip-hop movement arrived in the mid-70s (Snyder 2009, pp.26-31). The use of bold, bright colours and lines, as well as drop shadows and white highlights, make *La Main du Peuple* reminiscent of the lettering associated with writing culture. He also regularly paints according to the three basic levels of graffiti writing: the tag, a 'one-colour signature'; the throw up, or an 'evolved tag', usually in simple bubble letters; and the piece, or 'masterpiece', a more elaborate work containing 'a minimum of an outline colour, a fill colour, a background colour, and a highlight colour' (Whitehead 2004, pp.27-28). Furthermore, the aim of writing is to 'saturate the city' with your name and be seen in as many spots as possible (Snyder 2009, p.5). *La Main du Peuple*'s tag is not a name per se, but a simple finger drawn with a marker or spray paint. It is somewhat ubiquitous in Algeria, enough for the art magazine Ekteb to affirm: 'Vous avez surement rencontré ses tags représentant une main assez originale dans les rues d'Algérie' (Kamir 2019, np). Merine has also been known to collaborate with other Algerian graffiti artists who write in a style typical to graffiti writing culture, in Latin script. This association with a global subversive culture of painting illegally in the public space ties in with aesthetics of protest and the demand for the streets to belong to the people rather than corporations or governments. It demonstrates an awareness of one's position in society and a desire to speak out that predates the Hirak.

La Main du Peuple is the sum of many parts, of which writing culture is only one. Merine has combined the Algerian history of writing on walls for political ends with Western styles, as well as creating a unique hand character which transcends language and evokes issues specific to Algerian society. It points to opacity in the sense that it does not offer any transparent truths and requires interpretation. It is a cartoon-like image of a hand-foot, usually painted in a bright orange colour on paper and then pasted onto a wall (Kamir 2019, np). Merine claims the name comes from Ratiba Khemici's novel *Le Sang de la Face*, citing the line 'une main éducatrice du peuple, piétinée par le pouvoir' (Wesh Derna 2019); however, upon reading the book I did not find this quotation. In any case, the artist has said that this

image of ‘le peuple’ represented by a hand, and ‘le pouvoir’ by a trampling foot, inspired him to bring the two opposing sides together in a caricature of ‘une main deformée’, which is in fact a hand-foot hybrid (Wesh Derna 2019). Unlike Ait Issad’s focus on images of real people and their daily lives and protest, *La Main du Peuple* is a symbolic representation of the people painted in various contexts, colours and shapes, to explore lived reality and interrogate the *peuple* versus *pouvoir* binary: ‘tantôt on critique le pouvoir et tantôt le peuple !’ (Wesh Derna 2019). Although many of the works discussed here were created before the Hirak began, there are several parallels with the values and demands of the protesters, which means the representational power has only grown in significance since 22nd February 2019. MacDowall and De Souza (2018) observe that ‘due to their ephemerality or location, many instances of graffiti and street art will have a longer life as a digital object’ (p.6). So, while the works considered here have most likely now surrendered to the elements and the wear and tear of daily life passing by, the photographs act as a memorial to what once was; they are ‘memento mori’, to use Sontag’s term, as they immortalise the ephemeral and ‘testify to time’s relentless melt’ (Sontag 2008 [1977], p.15). *La Main du Peuple* starts a new life in the cyberspace, taking on new meanings as events unfold, as users interact with it and it is seen by audiences who would never possibly have encountered it in the physical world.

On 20th October 2019, Merine uploaded three works which were originally created in January 2018 during a street art intervention called ‘Casbah: Behind the Legacy’ (**Figure 6;** 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Working alongside several other artists from around Algeria, Merine pasted his signature hand onto scaffolding, walls and the pavement around the Casbah in Algiers, with the aim to ‘open dialogue with the people of the Casbah’.[9] The re-upload of these images to Instagram in 2019 comes after the collapse of several buildings in the neighbourhood, notably on 22nd April 2019, when two men, one woman and two children were killed (Algérie Presse Service 2019). Merine’s characters draw attention to the crumbling Casbah, but also portray the people, represented by the hand, as a beacon of hope. In the third image, captioned ‘support’, the brightly coloured hand emerges above a pile of discarded items to

[9] From the caption of another image from the same series, posted on 21st October 2019: “Quand la main du people ouvre le dialogue avec le people de la Casbah” (Merine, 2019d).

'support' the adjacent wall that is showing signs of structural weakness. The work exists for the people who inhabit the streets first and foremost: Merine confirms in the comments section that he exhibits his work in the street to make it 'public et accessible à tout le monde'. He has also said that his use of bright, 'childish' colours is intended to make the paintings appear innocent upon the first glance, attracting young people's attention to contemplate the deeper symbolism within (Kamir 2019, np). Similar to the effect of vibrant colour in the *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* series, the fluorescent hand standing out from its run-down surroundings offers a counterpoint to dark and sinister images associated with the country's past, signalling a hope in the future and the will of the people; the orange colour a symbol of 'l'optimisme et la bonne humeur'.[10] Therefore, even before the Hirak, Merine was presenting the people as engaged actors of change, and demonstrating a positivity and hopefulness that challenge the 'violent' and 'disengaged' stereotypes attached to Algerians which came to influence perceptions of the Hirak.

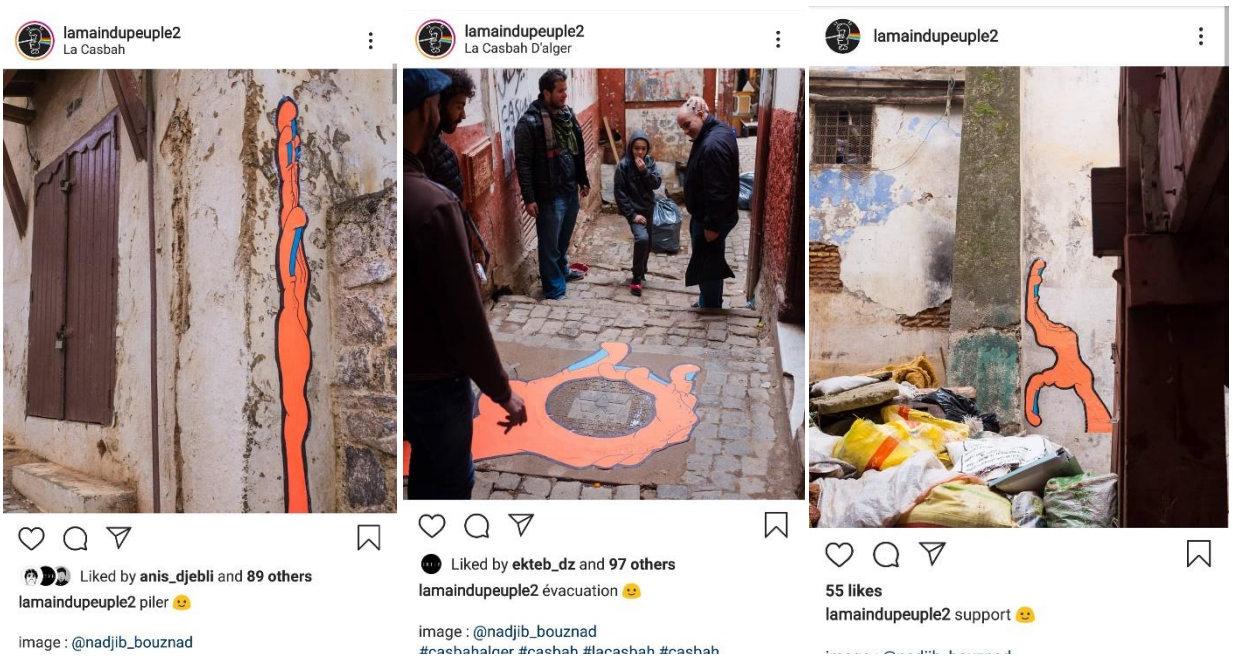

Figure 6: La Main du Peuple, *20th October 2019*

Another of the most unique characteristics of *La Main du Peuple*, particularly compared to other political graffiti in Algeria, is the way it uses the image to communicate a message rather than words. Ouaras (2015) has written about the importance of the linguistic diversity present in political graffiti in

[10] From a Facebook post published to the 'Casbah: Behind the Legacy' page (Casbah behind the legacy, 2018).

Algiers: Algerian Arabic, Literary Arabic, Tamazight, French and English are all present on the streets, the first four being the most dominant (p.23). He outlines several overlapping factors that generally determine the choice of language amongst those who write politicised graffiti in Algiers, which include political opinion, identity, and religion (p. 23). This connection between language and message reflects Algeria's plurilingual society and the political or ideological weight each language holds. The presence of Tifanagh (Tamazight) script, for example, has historically been a 'symbolic assertion of identity', particularly in the 1980s when protests broke out demanding the recognition of Tamazight language varieties (Ouaras 2018, p.179). Today, the Tifanagh letter *yaz*, or *aza*, as seen on the Amazigh cultural flag, features frequently in graffiti as a symbol of Amazigh identity, along with depictions of the Kabyle musician Lounès Matoub (Touloum and Zebiri 2016, pp.17-20; Ouaras 2015, pp.46-48). In contrast, *La Main du Peuple* focuses on the hand as a non-verbal communicator, which avoids the political or ideological connotations that choosing one language may hold; it represents the Algerian people, from Merine's perspective, without engaging in linguistic conflicts or privileging one cultural identity over another. Indeed, it respects the right to opacity and does not impose a singular, transparent narrative.

On 19th October 2019, Merine posted another series of three photographs to Instagram, originally created in 2017 (**Figure 7;** 2019e, 2019f, 2019g). The artworks depicted are attached to an abandoned building in Ghardaia, a city in the Sahara, and deal with freedom of expression and *hogra*, which is an Algerian word that refers to 'contempt… directed by the ruling class towards ordinary people' (Wolf 2019, p.708). In the second image, captioned 'censure', a length of rope hangs down from the top of the wall and is attached to give the impression that the hand is suspended in the air with its fingers tied tightly together, its freedom of expression suppressed. In this instance, the hand is applied in the usual way, painted first onto paper and then pasted onto the wall. What is unusual, however, is the lack of vibrant colour, an artistic choice to symbolise suppression and oppression: unlike the images from the Casbah, the dark gold hand does not immediately stand out from its sand-coloured adobe background as a beacon of optimism. The camera is positioned at a low enough angle to include the tops of some nearby palm trees and the blue sky in the frame, a bright and aesthetically pleasing sight typical of Ghardaia. However, these vibrant colours and postcard-like symbols are inaccessible to the dull hand,

bound to the confinements of the crumbling wall that obscures the audience's view of the life and colour beyond it. The hand hanging by a rope also represents death by suicide (confirmed in the caption where Merine has put the hashtag #suicidequote), the most sinister and desperate result of *hogra*, painfully illustrated in the opening scenes of Merzak Allouache's 2009 film *Harragas*, where a close friend of the film's protagonist Rachid is found dead after trying and failing to leave Algeria illegally three times. Bringing the harsh realities of censorship and suicide alongside beautiful, vibrant scenery in this way allows Merine to both criticise state censorship and indicate that the people could flourish if only their will were not suppressed. They are not presented as 'sleeping' or 'disengaged', but as suppressed yet powerful (in the first and last images, the finger is 'sewing up' the crack in the wall, representing a similar sentiment to the hand supporting the wall in the Casbah). Rather like Ait Issad's trashtag images taken outside the Notre Dame d'Afrique, undesirable reality is made visible, but equally the people are shown to be actors of change.

Figure 7: La Main du Peuple*, 19th October 2019*

Tracing Merine's early works reveals an understanding of the complexity of politics and society, and a belief in the people to finally overcome the barriers put before them to speak out against *hogra* and injustice. It offers a narrative far removed from those that depict Algerians as uninterested and disengaged, that ultimately foreshadows the overwhelmingly peaceful nature of the Hirak. On 22nd October 2019, Merine reposted an image captioned 'grenade' on Instagram (**Figure 8;** 2019h), featuring

a piece pasted on a building in the Kabylie region, created during the 'Racont-arts' festival in 2017. It features two hands clinging to each other, painted in the trademark fluorescent orange and blue, contorted and contained within the form of a grenade. Merine says of the work: 'C'est un complexe de notre peuple, collé l'un à l'autre et solidaire. Il ne veut pas revivre ce qu'il a déjà vécu. C'est pour ça qu'il a peur d'exploser' (Wesh Derna 2019). It is too simplistic to suggest that Algerians did not protest on a large scale until 2019 entirely because of the fear generated by the war in the 1990s (Zeraoulia 2020, p.26). However, Merine presents it as a factor, while also signalling the people's political awareness and the imminent 'explosion', suggesting mass reclamation of freedom is only a matter of time. A three-dimensional pin is attached to the piece, with a message written in French above inviting the audience to pull it (*tirez la goupille*).[11] In situ, this is particularly striking because it asks the Algerian people themselves to participate in the work, to put any fear behind them, recognise their power, take a hold of their freedom and pull the pin on the grenade.

Figure 8: La Main du Peuple, *22nd October 2019*

Of course, experiencing the work online is not the same as seeing it in person. As Shilton writes in her discussion of calligraffiti artist El Seed, drawing on RoseLee Goldberg's discussion of physical images

[11] As the piece was installed in Kabylie during the Racont-arts festival which is attended by people from all over Algeria and other countries, French in this instance serves as a lingua franca.

documenting live performance, viewing street art online 'involves 'gain' as well as 'loss'' (Shilton 2018, p.251; Goldberg 2004 [1998], pp.32-4). New technologies 'challenge the previously primary experience of street art' and the image travels across the cyberspace to be seen by wider and more diverse audiences than it would in the street (MacDowall and De Souza 2018, p.5). The work is no longer a 'local embodied experience', but something new that has been shaped by the digital platform (King 2018, p.227). Upon viewing the photograph of the grenade piece, the audience cannot experience and participate in the work in the same way they would if present in the location: they cannot walk around it, touch it nor attempt to pull the three-dimensional pin. However, haptic and kinaesthetic experience is not lost entirely. When viewing on a phone screen, users can zoom into the photograph with their fingers and move it around. They can also 'like' the photograph, write a comment below, send it to others in a direct message or share it to their personal 'story' (a feature which allows users to share photographs which only remain visible for 24 hours). All these actions are performed with the awareness that they are visible to others within the cyberspace, and therefore form part of one's projected cyberself, which makes online engagement with Merine's work a more personal and intentional experience. Furthermore, MacDowall and De Souza (2018) write that sharing graffiti or street art on Instagram gives the work a 'second life in which images circulate among a community of interest who can provide immediate feedback and comment' (p.10). By providing public feedback through likes and comments, users influence others' perceptions of the work and ultimately participate in the artistic process. The 'second life' of one piece may well influence the creation of the next: 'this widespread digitization of graffiti and street art does more than record actions and images, and elongate their presence; it feeds back into the very process through which such actions and images unfold, and alters their essential meaning' (Ferrell 2016, p.xxxiv).

Indeed, the representational value of the grenade is enriched when viewed on Instagram. Someone who sees the work in situ may not know the artist, so if they have questions about the work they must rely on their own interpretation. Viewed on Instagram, however, the artist is present. Even if there is a lack of information given in the caption, within the same minute the viewer can click on the account name and situate the work within its wider context, type '*La Main du Peuple*' into a search engine and find

interviews where Merine talks about what the hand represents. Or indeed, as there is an awareness of sharing the cyberspace with the artist, they can comment or message him directly and hope for a response – as I did, via Instagram's private direct messaging feature. I wanted to find out what was written below *tirez la goupille* as it is not visible even after zooming into the photograph. He informed me that it reads '*pas de panique, le peuple ne va pas exploser'*, a note of reassurance reinforced by the interactive pin mechanism, which the artist went on to tell me was created to snap back into place once it has been pulled (correspondence 5th December 2019). The grenade was already offering a counterpoint to assumptions that the Hirak would descend into violence before the movement began. Now, the pin has been pulled, the people did not explode, and they are calling for their freedom. The grenade, immortalised in the cyberspace, is a testament to the right to opacity for those who were categorised as 'violent' and 'disengaged'.

Overall, Merine continues and adapts historical symbolic practices of writing on walls for political ends, choosing to represent 'the people' as a hand in various positions and scenarios. Like Ait Issad, he uses colour to communicate optimism and hope, and the presence of his old works within the cyberspace make it clear that the Hirak is not an 'awakening'. He does not engage in linguistic conflict by writing verbal graffiti, choosing instead to guard opacity and communicate via hand gestures to be interpreted by the viewer. The works present the people as actors of change, and express confidence that demanding freedom will not lead to violent chaos, which when viewed in the context of the Hirak today, has been proved to be true. Viewed on Instagram, the work loses some experiential elements but gains new ones, acting as a new work of art connected to, but separate from, the original piece. It is also subject to symbolic interactions, expressions 'given', such as comments and likes, which may inform the creation of future works.

2.3 Conclusion

Merine and Ait Issad's works are conceptually diverse, as Ait Issad chooses to photograph real people and Merine has developed a hand character to represent the people in a more abstract way. However, both projects use colour techniques and juxtaposition of positives and negatives to communicate optimism, reject colonial nostalgia and the 'violent' stereotype. They both prove that the movement was

not an ‘awakening’ by making pre-Hirak political awareness visible, and point to opacity by avoiding singular, totalising narratives. The Instagram platform has a profound effect on the influence of the works in the cyberspace, as it allows for additional information to be provided in captions, geotags, hashtags and comments sections. Furthermore, as it is a social platform designed for interaction between individuals, it is understood that the artist is present within the cyberspace, and one’s interaction with their work constitutes an expression ‘given’ that forms part of one’s cyberself. This makes viewing art on Instagram an altogether more personal experience, interrupting the creation of totalising stereotypes that relies on the dehumanisation of the ‘other’.

YouTube is not as personal as Instagram when it comes to the cyberself, in that it does not provide, for example, a list of all the accounts who have liked a particular video, whereas Instagram does. However, comments sections reveal interactions between people keen to recreate their offline selves (as discussed in the introduction), that provide additional information and access to several perspectives and more nuanced debates. These interactions feed into the creation of ‘reaction videos’, where creators record their reaction to a song. The ‘recommended videos’ bar next to the video also provides further access points. Music videos represent the Hirak in ways static photographs cannot: through the audiovisual experience, interpersonal connection generated by the moving on-screen body, ambiance created by the music track, and lyrical content.

3. Chapter Two: Music Videos on YouTube

Several music videos relating to the Hirak were posted to YouTube and quickly spread far and wide on social media, which was a factor in the unification of the protesters and increased their visibility on the global stage (Lebdjaoui 2020, p.1347). In this chapter, I will focus on three songs and their music videos which evoke the Hirak and have reached significant audiences on YouTube. I will look firstly at *Allo le Système !* (2019) by Raja Meziane, followed by Soolking's *Liberté* (2019), and finally *Liberez l'Algérie* (2019) by various artists. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the music borne out of the Hirak; indeed, it is but a scratch on the surface. However, I hope to give some insight into music's power to challenge perceptions of the movement, and the role that YouTube plays in shaping this influence. I will ask: how do the lyrics, music and video come together to present the Hirak and encourage alternative readings of it? How does the YouTube platform influence the diffusion of the songs and the audiences' experiences of them? In contrast to the photography and street art discussed in relation to Instagram in the previous chapter, music videos provide the spectator with an extended verbal message set to music which in turn invites them to sing along or move their bodies in response.

Katz (2010) wrote about the 'free download' phenomenon that saw people's music libraries dramatically diversify as they could easily discover and access new genres from home and abroad (p.187). Today, music streaming makes this even easier as no download is required, and YouTube's 'recommended videos' feature increases one's likelihood of stumbling upon tailored videos they would otherwise not search for, called 'unarticulated want' by Davidson et al. (2010, p.293). Here, one's cyberself is not only interpreted by other users, but also by an algorithm which recommends videos to watch based on expressions 'given' and 'given off', such as one's watch history, playlists and likes. YouTube is home to a 'flourishing participatory culture' which encourages reaction to the videos, providing an insight into some interpretations of the audio-visual experience (Schneider 2016, p. 112). These reactions come in the form of likes and comments, but also the often-overlooked 'reaction video', a hugely popular video format in which a person or a group of people is filmed 'reacting' to a particular object, song or video. In his discussion about music reaction videos, McDaniel (2020) writes that they are 'not unlike listening to music with friends', only it is presented on YouTube as a performance to be

consumed in the same format as the music video (p.2). This content can have a profound effect on the way users experience music videos. Following a pattern of Symbolic Interactionism, users initially legitimise a song by reacting with clicks, likes and shares. They write comments below the video, discussing the work with one another, and then go on to influence other creators to record reaction videos. Even if one is watching alone, in the cyberspace it is a shared experience. As I will expand below, these interactions feed into the creation of reaction videos, which can also 'direct' one's feelings.

It cannot be ignored that music is also appropriated by the state to help them to manufacture a positive image. In 2014, various artists were enlisted to sing the song *Notre Serment Pour l'Algérie*, in support of Bouteflika's campaign for a fourth mandate, led by rai legend Cheb Khaled (see Roger 2014). One of the artists discussed here, Raja Meziane, was approached to take part in the song, but refused the offer (Ferhani 2019, np). One of the others, Soolking, was in a group called Africa Jungle at the time, who released a song against the 4th Mandate, entitled *4ème Mandat* (2014). Some Algerian people I spoke to expressed suspicion about one or both artists, believing that they were exploiting the Hirak to gain exposure. However, their refusal to support the fourth mandate suggests the contrary. Soolking and Meziane are, after all, rap artists – and rap music has long been associated with opposition to authority and oppression.

Rap emerged in New York in the 1970s, taking inspiration from the poets of the civil rights and black nationalist movements of the previous decade (Keyes 1996 p.225). The new subversive musical phenomenon eventually became a 'worldwide youth culture' (Androutsopoulos and Scholtz 2003, p.463), arriving in France in 1982, where it took the *banlieues* by storm and the largest market for hip-hop products outside the USA was born (Cannon 1997, p.191). In Algeria, rap music began to emerge in the 1990s, as young people were inspired by the music they heard coming out of the USA and France in years prior (Mouffokes and Boumedini 2017 p.44). It was pioneered by artists such as Lotfi Double Canon, MBS, TOX and Intik, who performed songs in Darija and French that dealt with social and political themes (Mouffokes and Boumedini 2017, pp.44-45). Rap's influence seems to follow from the role that rai music played at the end of the 20th century, when, as Schade-Poulsen (1999) writes, rai became 'an important site for discussions on the identity of Algerian society' (p.22). Because of this,

rap music was easily adapted and adopted into the Algerian context. Rap in Algeria today continues to possess a 'political dimension' (Mouffokes and Boumedini, 2017, p.44). Given its history of political engagement and criticism of the Algerian government, it is only natural that Algerian rap music should play a significant part in the creative representations of the Hirak today. Its presence in this context subverts attempts to label the movement an awakening, as it refers to earlier music that is similarly politically charged.

3.1 *Allo le Système !*

On 4th March 2019, Raja Meziane, a Prague-based rapper and singer originally from Maghnia in North-Western Algeria, uploaded a music video for her song *Allo le Système !* to YouTube. This rap song, with a catchy chorus and provocative fast-paced lyrics aimed at the regime in power, quickly caught the attention of *hirakistes* in Algeria and abroad. The original video has now been viewed nearly 49 million times. I will illustrate how Meziane breaks down stereotypes and promotes opacity through a combination of sound, visuals and repurposed words and phrases from the Hirak. She overtly dismantles the widespread belief that the Hirak was a sudden 'awakening', and a close analysis of the song and video shows a rejection of reducing the Hirak to certain 'icons', even though western media channels have attempted to attach this label to Meziane. I will also discuss the effect that symbolic interaction between users in the YouTube space has on the spread of the video across national borders, the experience of the work and the understanding of the movement. This includes looking at the role of reaction videos in these processes.

The song is performed in Darija, with occasional brief code-switches into French. It features two long 32-bar sections, separated by two rounds of a short chorus, which is then repeated a further four times after the final verse. The video opens with a shot of Meziane's feet as she makes her way into the underground station, an initial reminder that the Hirak has no icon and it is multifaceted in nature. The frame then cuts quickly to Meziane approaching the graffiti-covered payphone, signalling her national identity as she drops her Algerian passport onto the surface with a handful of Dinar coins. Her no-nonsense demeanour, reinforced by a brief shot of her staring down the camera, indicates the confrontation and building tension that is to come. During the long, accusatory first verse, the video

begins to cut rapidly between frames, giving the viewer the impression of being in several places at once. They are compelled to keep up with the narrative or risk losing their way: 'To participate, a viewer can't dawdle.' (Vernallis 2013, p.160). Throughout the clip, Meziane is seen in three locations in the Czech underground. A side-angle catches her rapping into the payphone; one close-up depicts her standing in the station with only her head and shoulders visible, singing directly to the camera; and finally, she is filmed from a low angle sitting on a flight of stairs, again with her gaze fixed on the camera. These frames are woven together amongst various amateur smartphone videos of events that took place in Algeria, taken by protesters.

The song and video evoke frustration, but there is also an air of relief and excitement that the mass movement Meziane desired has finally exploded onto the scene. This is implied by the length of the verses, which allow a feeling of frustration and agitation to build up before being triumphantly released with a rapid transition to the chorus. We see a change in Meziane's initial tough demeanour in the video: she starts to smile and move her arms in time to the music as her pitch raises and her voice intensifies. The chorus recycles common chants from the Friday protests, which have been adapted and restructured to take on a simple rhyming pattern that increases their memorability and gives them more of a chant-like quality than the fast-paced, complex rhymes of the verses: '*joumhou**ria**, bʁinaha š3**bia** / dimokra**tia**, mahi mala**kia** / zawali kwatu **kia** mlkader rahit**9ia** / rana jina ṭoufan, xṭouna ya ban**dia**' (we want a people's republic / a democracy, not a monarchy / the poor have suffered, they're sick of you / we are the flood, leave us alone you thugs). This regular structure encourages the desire to sing along, and because the basic sounds that form the rhyme are the same, it provides even non-Darija speakers with a catchy rhythm and predictable structure that they may feel comfortable to replicate. It encourages the spectator to mimic Meziane's transition from serious to joyful and participate with their body. The idea of 'pressure and release' is also communicated through the description of the Hirak as a 'flood' or 'deluge' (*toufan*) reinforced by three clips from the protests shown in quick succession which reveal the sheer scale of the crowds. As a flood is generally the result of an accumulation of water that gradually increases until it bursts the riverbanks or overwhelms a weak dam, so Meziane is presenting the Hirak as the result of a long period of pressure building. All the while, those in power believed the

youth were 'asleep', as she sings in the second verse: *ḥsabdou š3biba na3sa / xarjna lzn9a ngoulou xlaṣ ou rakoum xayfin* (you thought the youth were asleep / we are in the streets telling you to stop and you are shaking). This illustrates that the Hirak was not a sudden epiphany, and to suggest it was is to perpetuate the kind of myths upon which the regime thrived. Meziane protects opacity by evoking the complex network of events and tensions that preceded the Hirak without confining them to a simple narrative, rejecting attempts to suggest the country was politically disengaged for 20 years, while also refusing to offer any alternative transparency. She draws the viewer in to experience the song physically, which I shall explain further in my discussion of reaction videos.

The reasons Meziane gives for protest reveal the same frustrations evoked by other rappers before her, further obscuring the 'awakening' transparency. Pioneering group MBS rapped in 2001: 'je ne peux pas rester dans mon pays (…) je pars sans retour, avec le visa, sinon clandestinement' (Mouffokes and Boumedini 2017, p.48, their translation ; MBS 2001). This finds a parallel in the first verse of *Allo le Système !*, where Meziane raps *'š3b isouṭi fi botṭi'* (people leave on makeshift boats), accompanied by a recent video clip of several people packed onto a dinghy, revealing the dangerous and desperate conditions clandestine emigration entails. Similarly, Lotfi was already denouncing the country's gap between rich and poor in his 2003 song *Hugra*: 'le pays ça y a été partagé. Ceux qui vivent au sommet sont tranquilles, mais le reste de la société vit dans l'impasse, ils ont perdu leur dignité' (Mouffokes and Boumedini 2017, p.49, their translation ; Lotfi 2003). The same sentiment is touched upon by Meziane when she compares extreme poverty with the indulgent lifestyles of the rich elites who separate themselves from society: '*mazal alnes mljou3 tmout wntouma zahyin / bouledkoum lahyin / ṭal3tou lḥiṭ fil club des pins ou rakoum xabyin'* (people are still starving to death and you are partying / your children are having fun / you put up walls in Club des Pins and you hide). By referencing Club des Pins, an illustrious resort reserved for the richest in society, described as a 'symbole de la dictature' (Semiane, 2005, p.28), Meziane makes clear that she is speaking directly to the Algerian elite. She consistently refers to them using the second person plural (*ntouma*), creating a strong 'us vs. you/them' sentiment that has been associated with historically political rap in Algeria (Mouffokes and Boumedini 2017, p.51). The image of the elites 'hiding' behind walls in *Club des Pins* is one that many *hirakistes* will

recognise and once again represents a frustration that has been building for years: in 2005, Semiane called the resort 'une citadelle imprenable dans laquelle s'est isolée la nomenklatura de l'Algérie, se coupant ainsi définitivement de la réalité d'une société qu'elle ignore outrageusement.' (p. 28). Overall, by situating her voice amongst those who have been speaking out against social injustice for years and referencing shared injustices, Meziane once more subverts the 'awakening' stereotype while pointing towards multiple perspectives beyond her own, guarding the right to opacity.

In the second verse, Meziane moves her focus from injustice to a rejection of compliance. She weaves her personal experience into the wider context of the Hirak using words and phrases that have come to be associated with the protests, which, when teamed with real images from the streets, gives a sense of co-authorship between Meziane and the other protesters. She begins the verse with '*sm3ni mliḥ ya šyat gutlik farab3a'* (listen to me carefully, you puppet of the system, I told you at the fourth [mandate]'), a reference to 2014 when Meziane was approached to sing on *Notre Serment Pour l'Algérie* in support of Bouteflika's fourth mandate. When she refused, she was told that her music career in Algeria was over, one of a series of injustices that pushed her to relocate to Prague (Ferhani 2019, np). This can be interpreted as a purely personal anecdote, but is also a nod to others who were already protesting the regime in 2014.[12] Meziane has identified that the same problems persist, and so reiterates that she will not support a fifth term, which at the time the song was released was still the main demand of the Hirak: '*ʁir insani fi xobzik 2ana mani ṭam3a / klitou lbled ya harka wlyoum rahi ḥabsa / wabʁitou tzidou lxamsa'* ('leave me alone, I won't eat from the regime / you ate the country, you traitor, and today there is not much left / and you still want a fifth [mandate]'). She refuses to eat the *khobz*, literally 'bread', a word used to refer to the benefits the regime offers in exchange for support (eg. money in exchange for a song like *Notre Serment*). This is a common trope in the Hirak, a similar word being *khobziste*, which is defined as 'those who "eat" from the regime' (Haleh Davis et al. 2019, np). *Klitou lbled* is another phrase frequently used in the Hirak, literally meaning 'you ate the country', directed at the regime to refer to 'corruption and the misuse of national resources' (Haleh Davis et al. 2019, np). The words *chyat*

[12] It is not only rappers who were criticising the regime. The *Barakat* (enough!) movement opposed Bouteflika's fourth mandate in 2014 and members were arrested for protesting. See Karima Bennoune's interviews with the founding members Mustapha Benfodil and Amira Bouraoui (Bennoune 2014a; 2014b).

(like ‘puppet of the regime’) and *harka* (‘traitor’, stems from the colonial period) are also very specific to the Algerian context and reference something much larger than Meziane’s own experience. Meziane does not own these phrases; they belong to the Hirak. Their prevalence throughout the song gives a sense of co-authorship between her and the other protesters that points to the collective, multifaceted, Opaque nature of the movement. However, as Shilton (2016) notes, when art promotes opacity, ‘[t]he ‘other’ (and the extent to which the ‘self’ is implicated in it), […] will shift, depending on the spectator’ (p. 71). Viewers will have varied experiences of *Allo le Système !* based on their knowledge of Darija, for example, which will affect how they interpret the symbols and phrases used. The song’s location within the YouTube platform, however, provides an opportunity for public interaction and discussion (comments and reaction videos) which bring differently situated viewers closer together. This can contribute to further mutual understanding while also recognising each other’s differences.

As *Allo le Système !* gained popularity, Western media labelled Meziane the ‘voice’ or ‘icon’ of the Revolution (BBC 2019; Brut 2020). The artist was not entirely on board with this, however: ‘ceux qui me connaissent très bien savent que je ne suis pas trop pour ce genre de titres, puisque à la base je ne fais pas ce que je fais pour les titres’ (Brut, 2020). While Meziane’s song is worthy of study as one example of creative expression tied into and inspired by the Hirak, it is misleading to suggest that she is an ‘icon’ of the movement. Her voice is certainly influential, particularly in the online world, and it is worth listening to, but to declare her an ‘icon’ is to invalidate the very notion of popular protest: that it is a collective effort. Brut’s (2019) video, which labels Meziane an ‘icon’, may be a user’s first encounter with Meziane’s music, or they may be watching it because they know her already. Either way, it exposes Meziane’s story to a French audience who are likely unfamiliar with the details of the Hirak and who may take the ‘icon’ label at face value. However, as YouTube is a transnational space and each video with comments enabled provides a public forum, those with more experience of the events can choose to put forward counter arguments, visible in the same space as the ones they deem reductive. Several comments below Brut’s video opposed the choice to label Meziane an ‘icon’, often using the historic revolutionary slogan ‘un seul héros, le peuple’. For example: ‘Vous êtes complètement déconnectés de la réalité populaire, youtube n'est pas l'image du peuple, c [sic] juste un

extrait infime de ce qui se passe en Algérie. Icône de la révolution ? Mais c [sic] une blague ? La révolution dz [algérienne] n'a pas d'icône, UN SEUL HÉRO [sic], LE PEUPLE' (OSS/016, 2020). Some comments were more supportive, however. This kind of public debate influences other's experiences of the work in the online space and signals the 'impossibility of representing Algeria', to recall Llorens' phrase (Llorens 2019, p.16).

Listening to music on YouTube is, therefore, a shared experience between users that is initially a result of people deeming the work worthy of being seen through expressions given (clicking on the video, liking, and commenting). It then gives rise to dynamic discussion that takes place in several forums beyond the comments section of the original video. These processes of symbolic interaction feed into the creation of reaction videos, revealing YouTube's influence on the spread of the song to be viewed by an ever-rising number of people across the world. Meziane anticipated foreign viewership, as she opted to include English subtitles on the video using a feature built into the YouTube display page, which allows users to turn captions off or on at their leisure. As the original music video gains popularity, users export it to new forums and contexts by commenting below reaction video creators' content asking them to react to it. A British creator, *ThereYouAre*, who made a reaction video for *Allo le Système !*, reveals how these comments on her work influenced her decision to make the video: 'you guys were asking me on repeat, "please react to Raja Meziane […] *Allo le Système !*"' (ThereYouAre 2019). It is likely the English subtitles also played a part: 'it's got English subtitles, so thank god for that' (ThereYouAre 2019). She also reveals that people asking her to react to the song prompted her to read about the protests, which shows how the chain reactions provoked by the original song can lead to people learning about the Hirak who previously did not know it. The comments section below the video allows the discussion to continue even further. This shows how YouTube's participatory culture and subtitles feature brings people together and allows cultural objects to be freely shared and discussed across national borders, contributing to a recognition of difference but also an understanding between people. In this context, the viewer has access to much more than can be contained within a transparent categorisation of the Hirak, making them less likely to resort to simple 'icon' or 'awakening' labels.

McDaniel (2020) writes that reaction videos 'acknowledge that music affects our bodies in the act of listening' and turn that reaction into a commodity to be consumed (McDaniel 2020, p.15). Indeed, music is already a 'social activity' that is created by the movement of human bodies in the first instance - as the artists sing or play instruments - and then goes on to encourage movement in the form of dancing, clapping and so on (Overy and Molnar-Szakacs, 2009, p.489). The common time signature, regular on-beat accents and rhymes, emotive lyrics and powerful chorus of *Allo le Système !* certainly encourage such movements, creating a shared experience between artist and audience. As 'social and affective information' is expressed through music and interpreted by a listener, an abstract feeling of togetherness is generated: 'one is not alone when one listens to music' (Overy and Molnar-Szakacs 2009, p.499). Drawing on this concept, Carol Vernallis (2013) writes that music alone certainly 'bears the shape of feeling', but when listening to a song with no visual input alongside it these feelings can be hard to pin down, which is where the music video plays a vital role (p. 159). While the musical and lyrical features of *Allo le Système !* communicate somewhat vague emotional attachments to the Hirak and Algerian society, as well as generating a shared experience between artist and listener, Vernallis would say that the video 'directs' these feelings, making them more defined and recognisable (Vernallis 2013, p.159). Music reaction videos make these emotive processes visible and further 'direct' the viewer's experience of the song. For example, Meziane's smile and joyous dance during the transition to the first chorus 'directs' the feeling of pressure, evoked by the length, lyrics and sonorous elements of the first verse,

being released. In a reaction video by Lebanese Canadian creator *Loush*, he can be seen contemplating the verse with a serious expression, before suddenly jumping to smile and dance with the transition to the chorus, saying: 'I love that, man, that just built up' (Loush, 2019; **Figure 9**).

The performing body in music video draws the viewer into their world, creating an interpersonal attachment informed by the shared musical experience and an understanding of one's own body projected onto the other (Vernallis 2013, p.160). As I have discussed, *Allo le Système !* is the only music video of the three analysed here to feature images of the protests. What is particularly striking is that if Meziane's singing voice and moving body generate a feeling of presence and connection between her and the viewer, then to bring images of crowds into this space is to signal their presence, too. An interpersonal, bodily attachment is formed not just between the viewer and Meziane, but between the viewer, Meziane *and* the crowds of protesters, held together by the overarching music track. Therefore, the clips from the Hirak provide visual context to the lyrics as well as alluding to the collective nature

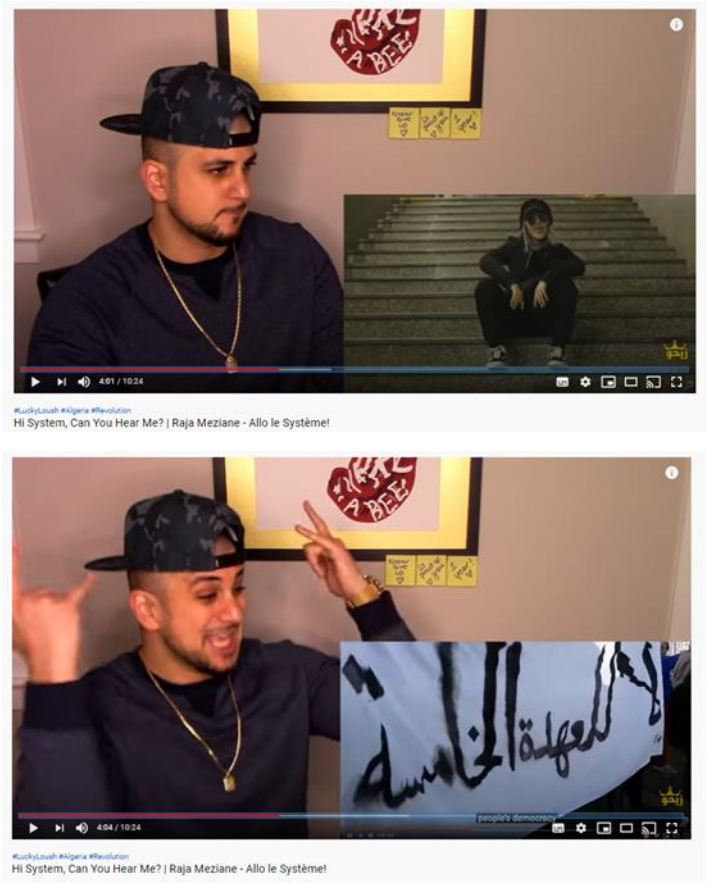

Figure 9 : Loush (2019) reacts to Allo le Système !

of the movement. It creates a connection between the viewer and the on-screen bodies that interrupts

the process of dehumanisation that is required to reduce the 'other' to transparent, reductive narratives – labelling them as 'violent', for example. When reacting to the video, both *ThereYouAre* and *Loush* express that they are impressed by the movement's peaceful nature and encourage the protesters to continue in their struggle. As foreign observers, they are clearly aware of their distance from the Hirak, but they show support to their *hirakiste* viewers because they feel affected as fellow humans: 'a lot of people are asking me "are you Algerian? Is this why you care so much about our cause?" And no, but it's a human cause' (ThereYouAre 2019).

Overall, *Allo le Système !* provides an alternative vision of the Hirak that challenges popular narratives that label the movement an 'awakening' or try to reduce it to a single 'icon'. It does this by building tension in the verses and describing the protests as a 'flood' that has been building, as well as by evoking older political rap music and using words and phrases from the Hirak to create a sense of co-authorship between Meziane and the protestors. The constant reference to other perspectives beyond Meziane's points to opacity as it resists her classification as an 'icon' for a complex and diverse movement. Furthermore, the YouTube platform allows users to publicly express their opinions about the song, discuss it with one another and ask others to create videos reacting to it. These interactions help to provide a nuanced view of the song and the Hirak, and foreign reaction videos reveal the ways that music affects the emotions and helps to build interpersonal connections that break down stereotypical ways of viewing the 'other'. The next song that I will discuss, *Liberté* by Soolking featuring Ouled el Bahdja, takes a different approach to Meziane. Although some of the messages overlap, Soolking's presentation of the movement is more ambiguous and relaxed, and Ouled el Bahdja's presence on the song provides more context on the musical diversity of the Hirak.

3.2 *Liberté*

Abderraouf Derradji, known as Soolking (b. 1989, Algiers), has been a rapper from the beginning of his musical career. Early on, he saw some success in Algeria with the rap group Africa Jungle, formed in 2007, with whom he moved to France some years later to pursue a career there (Choquet 2016, np).

Now primarily a solo artist, Soolking still lives in France and has risen to international fame. His music, while still maintaining a hip-hop foundation, has come to be influenced by rai, RnB, reggae, and French pop music from the mid-to-late 1900s (Weickert 2018, np). In March 2019, almost a month after the Hirak began, he released a song entitled *Liberté* (featuring Ouled el Bahdja), which echoes the calls of the protesters for a free Algeria. The song follows a verse-chorus-bridge form (VCVCBC) to a 4/4 time signature, with a much slower tempo and a gentler guitar sample than *Allo le Système !*, giving it a more relaxed ambience. Soolking's voice is heavily-autotuned yet unique, floating somewhere between rap and song, providing a ballad-like melody and a rhyming structure rooted in hip-hop: the sounds are not always perfect or even imperfect rhymes, showing evidence of a complex system characteristic of rap, that Oliver Kautny describes as the 'repetition, transformation, and restructuring of the same or similar speech-sounds in a heteronomous soundscape of non-rhyming speech' (Kautny 2015, p.103).

The song's relation to the Hirak is, however, significantly more covert than *Allo le Système !*. The video features only Soolking sitting at a table in front of a roaring fire, smoking a cigarette and writing as the lyrics appear on screen. There are no images of protest, and the lyrics are somewhat ambiguous. *Liberté* is by far the most popular of all the works discussed here, reaching more than 200 million views on YouTube alone. The comments section is filled with users declaring their support from all over the world. However, the song's popularity on the internet is not always reflective of its presence within the Hirak, not least because it is mostly performed in French to appeal to the large French-speaking rap market. It was reproduced occasionally by protesters in Algiers, Montréal, Paris, Washington, and London (Lebdjaoui 2020, p.1416), but Western media's tendency to label it the 'hymne des manifestants algériens' (Poussel 2019; Touati 2019) is once again a totalising statement that serves only to gloss over the vast musical and political diversity of the movement. While discussions and reaction videos help to reclaim opacity, as discussed in relation to Raja Meziane, the YouTube platform can also create reductive perceptions. It is possible to find videos of protesters singing *Liberté*, which when viewed out of context fuel the confirmation bias that the song is an 'anthem' or has a special place in the Hirak. However, I will argue that Soolking's decision to work with Ouled El Bahdja (OEB hereafter) provides an access point for foreign online viewers to gain a more nuanced understanding of the

movement. Furthermore, although the lack of images of protest and the song's ambiguity mean it is not as directly informative as *Allo le Système !*, particularly for a foreign audience, it can be argued that this protects opacity even more by evoking the Hirak in a way that does not seek to clarify it or alienate any participants. The song challenges the idea that the movement was an awakening, and the lyrics, mellow beat and alliteration of soft sounds provide a counterpoint to narratives that suggest Algerians are 'violent' and that the Hirak will end badly.

The most noticeable feature of *Liberté* is that pacifism pulsates through it, lyrically and musically. In the first verse, there is strong alliteration of the voiceless alveolar fricative [s] and the voiceless labio-dental fricative [f], and plosive consonants are aspirated. Kyle Adams developed a graph that considers the level of staccato or legato of a given rap verse ('relative articulation') on the *x* axis, plotted against how 'sharp' or 'dull' the consonants are ('absolute articulation') on the *y* axis. (Adams 2015, p.125).[13] He determines that a high level of legato (smooth transitions between notes) teamed with an increased rate of 'dull' consonants, or fricatives, is indicative of relaxed speech. Relaxed speech of a political nature aims to assert a point of view, but not incite or provoke violence. So, as Soolking addresses the *pouvoir,* separating 'us' from 'them', like Meziane, with the use of the pronouns *vous* and *on* (used here as a colloquial replacement for *nous*), he asserts the authority of the united Hirak while also emphasising their desire for peaceful interaction. He repeats the fricative-heavy phrase *excuse-moi d'exister,* which appears to be related to the Algerian expression *smhouna ki rana 3ychin* (we are sorry for being alive). This is used as a response to mistreatment and is often employed in a political context. When translated into French, it feels like a laying down of arms, or a radical politeness in the face of adversity. The commitment to pacifism is summed up in the final line of the first verse: *rends-moi ma liberté, je te le demande gentiment*.

The lines in the first verse are delivered in quaver notes, with long pauses of four beats between each utterance. The opening line, 'parait que le pouvoir s'achète', asserts the political nature of the song, but

[13] Adams' graph is an adaptation of a similar graph analysing the boundaries between speech and song by George List (1963).

it is one of the shared beliefs upon which the Hirak is founded: that power in Algeria is in the hands of the wealthy. By following this up with 'liberté, c'est tout c'qui nous reste', Soolking encourages unity in opposition to this, promoting a feeling of 'us' vs. them' as seen in *Allo le Système !* and earlier Algerian rap songs. However, he does not specify *liberté* as anything other than freedom from those in power, because beyond this definition, even within the Hirak, viewpoints will differ considerably. As Soolking is not as explicit in his choice of words as Raja Meziane, breaking the sentences up with long pauses allows the listener time to reflect on the message. In the video, too, we see him alone, quietly contemplating and writing his thoughts down (later he sings: *j'écris ça un soir / pour un nouveau matin*), indicating the measured, peaceful approach of the *hirakistes*. While his subtle references to large and complex issues may be construed as an insincere engagement with the protests, it certainly allows people space to project their own story onto the song, without alienating anyone or giving information that outsiders could use to label the Hirak in reductive ways. This was also characteristic of Rai at the turn of the century, which did not reveal its message 'already fully formed', but instead encouraged 'new meanings to be created and projected in dialogic encounters' (Young 2003, p.74). Perhaps this is a necessary approach when trying to capture the essence of an irreducibly diverse movement while maintaining the right to opacity and an overwhelmingly peaceful image.

Soolking goes on to evoke the collective painful memory of the Black Decade in the 1990s, without engaging in divisive narratives surrounding it: 'si le scenario se répète, on sera acteurs de la paix'. As Mellah (2020) writes, the effects of the civil war are still felt today and quietly underpin the movement: 'la mémoire est présente dans toutes les familles qui se sont mobilisées dans le hirak' (p.109). Soolking declares that the Algerian people would be *acteurs de la paix* if history were to repeat itself, echoing the tendency of the Hirak to subtly reference state and military involvement in the civil war, while denouncing violent action today. Official discourse states that Islamists were the only perpetrators in the 'national tragedy', but Mellah argues that the special forces and the intelligence agency were also to blame, among others (Mellah 2020, pp.109, 131). She goes on to say that the Hirak has recognised state involvement in some ways, notably through the chant '*pouvoir assassin !*' that emerged in the 90s and references to the forced disappearances that took place, but has not touched upon many other

injustices (Mellah 2020, p.124). However, she states that the Hirak's pacifist tendencies, the calls of '*silmiya !'* and '*khawa khawa !'* (brothers, brothers) addressed to the police and the army, demonstrates an awareness of the violent past and a desire to leave it behind: 'une maturité qui promet une capacité de panser les blessures de la sale guerre' (Mellah 2020, p.138). It is this 'maturity' that Soolking touches upon in *Liberté,* which counteracts the foreign perception of Algerians as 'violent' that stems in part from the memory of the civil war.

Soolking's articulation in the second verse transitions to staccato notes and alliteration of the voiceless and voiced bilabial plosives [p] and [b]. However, there is also an emphasis on some dull sounds, such as in the on-beat rhymes *men**songes*** and ***rongent***, which contain the voiceless alveolar and uvular fricative respectively, and share the voiceless palatal fricative. If we were to go by articulation alone, Adams' graph suggests that this 'sharp' articulation peppered with 'dull' sounds is typical of speech that is somewhere between 'angry' and 'playful'. Of course, the music track and beat are responsible for much of the song's ambience. As Adams writes about Ladybug Mecca's verse in the song *It's Good to be Here* by Digable Planets: 'Ladybug Mecca employs several "sharp" techniques to *reinforce* the cheerful nature of the beat and lyrics' (Adams 2015, p.127, my emphasis). Her articulation was deemed 'playful', but that alone was not enough to provide the whole song with this label – it only reinforces what already exists. Soolking's articulation in this instance, however, diverges from the relaxed beat and gentle acoustic sample of *Liberté.* This subtly captures the anger the *hirakistes* feel towards the regime and the light-hearted ambience of most of the protests, while ensuring it all remains rooted in a peaceful, relaxed, and non-confrontational environment.

In the video, the peaceful ambiance is replicated as the spectator is drawn in to share the moment with Soolking as he pensively writes the lyrics in front of the fire, recalling Vernallis' (2013) ideas about interpersonal connection discussed in the last section. The only ostensibly visible reference to politics is a poster on the left wall in the first seventeen seconds of the song, depicting a man in a gas mask with the words 'stop politics' above him. However, the poster is easy to miss as it is slightly obscured, and the eye is drawn to the roaring fire in the centre of the frame with Soolking just to the left as the camera draws nearer to them. Other references to politics are metaphorical, inspired by the original video for

Ultima Verba (2019) by OEB, an anti-Bouteflika football song which heavily influenced *Liberté* (I explain this further later). In *Ultima Verba*, five candles dominate the frame and slowly burn down as OEB sing hors champ. The only other feature of the video is the body of the guitar in the background and the guitarist's hand as he plucks the riff. As the candle's flame is ephemeral and will always burn out, it is the perfect representation of the regime – specifically Bouteflika's attempted five mandates – for those who believe it must come to an end. They counteract this visual with the description of the people as a fire that will never go out, a line which is reproduced by the group in the bridge to *Liberté*: '*wa hna homa libtila, ah ya houkouma / w nnar hadi ma tetfach'* (we are your affliction, oh government / and this fire will never go out). The candle and fire images are carried over into *Liberté.* As the song starts, the frame cuts to a closer shot of Soolking and it becomes clear there are five tealight candles in a row on the table next to him, and in front of him is a huge, roaring fire which provides a visual illustration of OEB's description of the people, later reinforced by a closer shot of the candles with the fire in the background as Soolking sings 'là-bas, il n'y a que le peuple'. Like the lyrics, these images require contemplation and will have different meanings depending on the viewer. They avoid stereotypical images of protest and therefore do not inadvertently represent an ideology, religious position, gender, or way of protesting. The song and video undo reductive perceptions, but do not provide an alternative singular narrative, always allowing opacity to prevail.

Liberté points away from the reduction of the movement to an 'awakening'. Like Meziane, Soolking alludes to the build-up of tension using a water metaphor and alludes to some reasons for unrest, but the music track remains calm and slow to emphasise peaceful intention. In the first verse, he denounces the official speeches laced with untruths to which the people had seemingly grown accustomed: 'Si faux, / Vos discours sont si faux / Ouais, si faux, / Qu'on a fini par s'y faire'. Artificiality and false fronts are deeply ingrained in the Algerian system: Benderra et al. write that the military decision-makers hide behind a pseudo-democratic façade made up of ministers and parties who have no real influence (Benderra et al. 2020, p.53). The people know this system inside-out, and after the liberation of the country from France in 1962, they are now peacefully calling for the liberation of the people from the regime (Benderra et al. 2020, p.53). It is this political awareness preceding the Hirak that Soolking

illustrates with a metaphor of a glass that has reached its capacity: 'Mais c'est fini / Le verre est plein'. Like Meziane's 'flood', this requires an accumulation of 'water', or tension, before spilling over. His assertion that the people had 'grown accustomed' to the situation does seem pose a problem for the argument, as it could support the belief that the people had collectively 'fallen asleep' to politics over time. However, in the opening to the second verse, Soolking repurposes a lyric from his song *Dalida* (2018), changing the pronoun from 'je' to 'on' to become 'ils ont cru qu'on était morts, ils ont dit bon débarras'. Another parallel can be drawn with Meziane's lyric *'ḥsabdou š3biba na3sa'* (you thought the youth were asleep). He then follows this up with 'ils ont cru qu'on avait peur de ce passé tout noir', another reference to the Black Decade and other conflicts, reminiscent of *La Main du Peuple*'s *Grenade* discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Merine's encouragement to 'pull the pin' on the grenade similarly represents moving on from the past, leaving fear behind and demanding freedom. Both works point to opacity as they are a testament to the *hirakistes* shaking free from stereotypes enforced upon them by the State and foreign observers. Essentially, they recognise and reject narratives that reduce Algerians' stories and humanity to simple labels, pointing to opacity by showing they exist far beyond the limited perceptions of the 'other'.

Liberté is also tightly connected to football culture because it features OEB, fans of the team USM Alger. The group, whose name means 'Sons of Algiers' (*Bahdja*, or 'joyful', is a nickname for Algiers), write and record football songs in Darija to be reproduced in the stadiums and, latterly, the Hirak. Their song *Ultima Verba* (2019), which was released on YouTube just before the Hirak began, heavily influences *Liberté*. Its gentle acoustic guitar riff is sampled throughout, and the chorus and bridge are almost identical. Football chants such as this are more worthy contenders for the title of 'anthem' of the Hirak because, as I discussed in relation to *Algérie Vue d'en Bas* in the first chapter, they were politically engaged before the movement and continue to be influential. Several other chants and songs that feature heavily in the Hirak originated in the stadiums, perhaps most notably OEB's *La Casa del Mouradia* (2018). In a documentary, Maher Mezahi describes OEB as 'some of the most musical [fans] in the entire world', and Hamdi Baala explains that football songs and chants are so powerful in Algeria because they have long been 'one of the most relevant political discourses available' (Copa90 Stories,

2019). It is striking, therefore, that these voices which were once confined to the stadiums were not only filling the streets every Friday but are featured on a song that has reached international heights. The group's contribution to *Liberté* points towards the culture of speaking out against the government that has been cultivated in the stadiums since before the Hirak, once again providing an alternative to the 'awakening' narrative.

For different viewers, OEB will resonate in various ways according to their knowledge of Algerian football culture, the Hirak, and Darija. Reaction videos to *Liberté* provide some insight into foreign viewers' initial understanding (or misunderstanding), which is then subject to discussion in the comments section, where people choose to provide further information. This is evidence of the participatory culture that begins on the page for the music video in question and is then transported to other channels and forums, creating simultaneous discussions, debates and reactions that when explored, ultimately point to the opacity of the Hirak. In a video by French father and son duo *Skilaw & l'Padre*, Skilaw says '[Soolking] revient avec Ouled el Bahdja, que je ne connais pas, mais ça doit être un algérien' (Skilaw & l'Padre 2019). Clearly, he was not aware of OEB's connection to football, nor that they are a group and not a solo artist. However, in the comments section various users reacted to this by providing information about who OEB are and directing Skilaw to the video for *Ultima Verba*. For example: 'Oulad bahja ci le. Group des suporteur USMA d'Alger équipe de foot d'Alger [sic]' (Badrou Baddi 2019), and 'C'est à Ouled El bahdja d'abord en arabe ====> [link to *Ultima Verba*]' (Sabrine Sab 2019). These examples simultaneously promote a further understanding that counteracts the 'awakening' label while signalling that there is more to the Hirak's musical production than Soolking's song which was described as an 'anthem' in French media. They further guard opacity by noting that the original song is in Algerian Arabic and not French. Understanding comments sections as a collection of expressions 'given' by people who are largely willing to recreate their offline-self in the cyberspace emphasises the role they have to play in an individual user's experience of the song and perception of the Hirak. Each commenter represents a real person projecting their 'self' in the cyberspace, therefore the complex interactions between them create a digital impression of the diversity of the Hirak, as Algerians and foreigners alike come together to discuss the issue.

Overall, *Liberté*'s relaxed music track and the space given for the listener to reflect on the lyrics counteract perceptions of the Hirak as violent and protects opacity as it does not impose any singular narrative onto the events. Soolking challenges the 'awakening' perception, too, by alluding to the tension that was building before the Hirak, and by featuring OEB on the song, who have been creating political football songs for years. Reaction videos reveal the disparity of experience, as some viewers do not know OEB for example, but also provide a forum in the comments section for other users to react and provide additional information. YouTube plays an important role in widening music videos' audiences and providing space for communities to grow around them. The final song I will look at, *Libérez l'Algérie* by various artists, provides a multilingual representation of protest that focuses on unity and peace, using signs and collective singing and clapping to simulate a moment of the Hirak.

3.3 *Libérez l'Algérie*

Libérez l'Algérie is a collective project, started by singer songwriter Amine Chibane and completed with the help of composer Aboubakr Maatallah, actress Mina Lachter and singer Amel Zen. The pop song was posted to YouTube on 1st March 2019 (Lebdjaoui 2020, p.1360). Chibane, Lachter and Zen each sing a verse in the song, along with musician Mohamed Ghouli, known as 'TiMoh', and Sadek Bouzinou from the reggae group Democratoz. All the artists come together to sing the chorus, a joyous collective repetition of *'libérez l'Algérie'*. Many other artists and actors took part in the video, in which they lip sync the lyrics together, hold up protest signs and remove chains from their bodies. The music video for the song was originally posted to the YouTube channel *Algérie Music Play*, where it reached a little under half a million views. Amel Zen uploaded it to her channel the next day, and this duplicate version of the video currently has 5 million views. While the song does not appear to have enjoyed as large an audience as *Liberté* or *Allo le Système !*, it is worth studying because its collective nature avoids reducing the movement to the image and beliefs of one person, and provides a counterpoint to other occasions various artists have come together to support the regime, notably *Notre Serment Pour l'Algérie*. In addition, it shows how genres other than rap have been employed to evoke the Hirak.

The music track for *Libérez l'Algérie* has a faster tempo than *Liberté*, but maintains a calm and peaceful ambiance, in contrast to the tension evoked by Meziane in *Allo le Système !*. It features a 4/4 beat, with syncopated guitar strums that give the song a bouncy and playful feel and encourage movement. The music track is familiar and accessible to 'Western' audiences, but the occasional quartertone vocal flourish and the use of indigenous languages root it in an Algerian tradition, placing a barrier of opacity between the Western viewer and the performers. It finds a parallel with rai, which started to leave the maqam scale (Arabic quartertone notes) behind after the introduction of electronic instruments and some European influence, aside from some 'vocal melismatic ornamentation', or singing several notes in one syllable (Langlois, 1996, pp.265-6). There is no translation of the lyrics on the YouTube page for a non-arabophone or non-amazighophone audience, therefore most of the song's meaning is concealed from the foreign viewer, unless they search elsewhere in the cyberspace for the lyrics which are available in French in another, fan-made video (Khaled Ben Abderrahmane, 2019). For non-amazighophone Algerians, too, the verse in Kabyle and Chenoua is a reminder of the diversity within the Hirak and that their own perspective is not entirely representative of the movement, yet it promotes solidarity despite this fact.

Amine Chibane is first to sing, opening the song with the line '*yema ktri mn d3awi wledak rahoum kharjin'* (mother, multiply your prayers, your children are going out). The personification of Algeria as the 'mother' of the nation reinforces the sentiment that all Algerians are siblings, promoting a unified society. This is confirmed when the verse is repeated at the end of the song, translated into Kabyle (in the first half, performed by Amine Chibane) and Chenoua (in the second, sung by Amel Zen), during which a sign is held up that reads *khawa khawa*, 'brothers, brothers'. The different languages are representative of the vast linguistic diversity in the country but are presented as something to celebrate rather than to eradicate. In 2017, Tony Langlois wrote that 'an Algeria that can embrace its complexity rather than seek to reduce it is most likely to enthuse its population for the ongoing nation-building project' (Langlois 2017, pp.181-2). The Hirak has confirmed this to be true; however, while the *hirakistes* are overwhelmingly embracing diversity, the state has continued in its attempts to quash it. While the Hirak features rich linguistic difference and celebration of Algeria's indigenous languages

(Darija and the Tamazight varieties), the state continues its repetitive discourse in standard Arabic, a language far removed from the daily lives of most Algerians (Ouaras 2020, p.23). While students worked together to create slogans and ensure arabophones held signs in Tamazight, and amazighophones held signs written in Arabic, the state banned the Amazigh flag from being displayed at marches (Ouaras 2020, pp.25-29). The sibling imagery and the presence of Darija and Tamazight in *Libérez l'Algérie* further encourages a non-violent image of Algeria and an understanding of the Hirak as peaceful, confirmed by another line: '*fi masira silmiya 3atalghir am3oulin'* (in a peaceful march, they ask for change). While foreign media and observers are often still fixated on the past and view the country through the lens of the Black Decade or the so-called Berber Spring, where citizen fought citizen and trust between compatriots was broken down, the song's narrative presents people looking forward to a unified future.

Libérez l'Algérie does not feature real footage of the protests, but it does allude to them in a more direct way than Soolking in *Liberté*. It could be described as a simulation of protest, or a moment of protest. Each person in the video is filmed standing alone, positioned in the centre of the frame from the waist up with their gaze fixed on the camera. The video cuts rapidly between them as they lip-sync the words and hold signs with various slogans written in Arabic, French, Tamazight, and English. Some of the artists joined from abroad (such as Bouzinou who lives in Senegal) whose home videos are edited to be black and white, maintaining the dark colour scheme of the video but also visibly acknowledging the voices of the diaspora. Those filmed in the studio in Algeria stand before a black background and are illuminated from the left side, emphasising the Hirak's belief in the people as the only saviours of the country (recalling the iconic slogan *'un seul héros: le peuple'*). The video once again 'directs' the viewer's feelings and conjures up an interpersonal attachment between them and the bodies on the screen. Cutting quickly between faces creates an impression of being surrounded by this group of people who are rallying around a common goal. All the voices come together in the chorus to reinforce this, particularly at the end when the participants all begin to clap in time to the music, an action that encourages the viewer to join in. Encircling the viewer in this way and maintaining eye contact encourages personal connection. While typical static journalistic images of protest can be passively

observed, this creative simulation implicates the spectator and encourages their participation through singing or bodily movement. For outsiders, this exposure to, and involvement in, a moment of protest helps to break down misguided prejudices they may hold about the Hirak, such as the 'violent' image discussed previously, because they are faced with the humanity of the protesters in meeting their gaze. For those who are involved with the movement on the streets, it is an encouragement to continue, focusing particularly on the need to remain unified despite cultural, linguistic, or social differences.

Libérez l'Algérie is not the only creative endeavour to encourage solidarity between the different cultures and languages of Algeria in the context of the Hirak. In October 2019, I visited an exhibition in the outskirts of Paris called *Algérie, un rêve d'artistes,* which was curated around the theme of the Hirak. I saw a painting there by Paris-based artist Anouar Boudia called *Khawa Khawa* (2019), which depicted seven people wearing various traditional outfits from around Algeria, such as the *hayek* and Kabyle dress, before a background of landmarks (**Figure 10**). The title, meaning 'brothers, brothers', again evokes the idea that all Algerians are siblings, only this time a greater diversity of culture is represented. It does not focus solely on the north of the country, as is often the case, but gives visibility to those who live deep in the Sahara. Southern Algerians, and by extension black Algerians, are often othered by their northern compatriots and face racial discrimination (Langlois 2017, p.179). *Khawa Khawa* reveals a desire to move away from division and inequality, towards a more unified population that can work together. *Libérez l'Algérie*, however, fails to represent black Algerians or Southern culture and appears to be heavily centred on the north of the country. Furthermore, it features many women but not one wears hijab, which also gives an inaccurate representation of the Hirak. The image of the Hirak that is presented is one that is linguistically plural, which is true, but also entirely light-skinned and religiously ambiguous, which is not the reality. This is a problem for *Libérez l'Algérie* because its endeavour to feature many different people, pointing to individual perspectives, linguistic diversity as well as the presence of the diaspora, leaves it with a burden of responsibility to provide visibility to other parts of the country that are overlooked, and to acknowledge the presence of hijabi women. This shows how a song can both challenge erroneous perceptions and create them.

Figure 10: Khawa Khawa *(2019), Anouar Boudia. Acrylic on cardboard [author's photo].*

The potential to feed into certain stereotypes does not mean it does not maintain the capacity to break down others. Firstly, the collective nature of the video and the emphasis on pacifism is still a powerful tool, as explained by Algerian-Canadian creator *Simple Me* in her reaction video to the song: 'on a souvent entendu dire que le people algérien est un peuple sauvage, qui casse, insulte, frappe […] alors que là on est en train de prouver qu'on est pas un peuple sauvage, qu'on est pas un peuple violent' (Simple Me, 2019). It is clear that the song affected *Simple Me* in a profound way that is distinctly removed from the experience of the foreign creators discussed above when they watched *Allo le Système !*. *Loush* and *ThereYouAre* recognised their distance from the Hirak, as Lebanese Canadian and British viewers respectively, and expressed support to the *hirakistes* without suggesting it was their place to be actively involved in the protest. *Simple Me*, however, as an Algerian living in Canada, is reminded of her physical distance from the Hirak, but expresses a desire to take part: 'j'ai envie de prendre le premier avion et venir manifester avec vous' (Simple Me 2019). Secondly, recommended videos, comments and reaction videos create a complex network of information relating to the Hirak that is visible alongside the music video in question. In the YouTube space, a video is rarely viewed without at least a glimpse of some further information in the recommended videos bar. Because *Libérez l'Algérie* did not reach as wide an audience as Soolking and Meziane, it is the subject of fewer reaction videos. However, due to recommended videos or comments sections, an individual user's exposure to the other songs discussed here increases their likelihood of stumbling across *Libérez l'Algérie.* Although she did

not make a reaction to this song, the British YouTube creator *ThereYouAre* (2019) begins her reaction video to Meziane's *Allo le Système !* with a short clip of her listening to *Libérez l'Algérie,* lipsyncing the repeated French lyrics of the chorus. It appears that she did not listen to it with the ulterior motive to commodify her reaction, because she did not make a separate video about it. By making connections with her Algerian viewers through music and processes of online symbolic interaction, *ThereYouAre* has gained access to various perspectives and different creative expressions of the movement, that feed into her further discovery of information beyond the initial reaction videos created to attract viewers.

Ultimately, *Libérez l'Algérie* points to diversity and opacity using various languages, which are interpreted in different ways depending on the viewer. It promotes unity and pacifism through a combination of the music track, the lyrics, and the video which surrounds the viewer with many people and encourages human connection. In this way, it breaks down stereotypes of Algerians as 'violent'. However, in its attempt to represent diversity, it is also glaringly missing representation of hijabi women and black Algerians. That aside, reaction videos reveal the positive effect the song can have in evoking peacefulness, and they provide evidence for the vast amount of additional information that can be found in the YouTube space using one music video as a starting point.

3.4 Conclusion

Music videos that engage with the Hirak employ diverse techniques to represent the movement and challenge reductive perceptions. Soolking and Meziane employed metaphors to evoke the tension that was building before the Hirak, breaking down the 'awakening' narrative. Meziane further communicates this with the music track that builds up before a triumphant transition to the chorus, whereas Soolking opts instead for a relaxed, slow beat to counteract the 'violent' stereotype. *Libérez l'Algérie*, too, rejects violence with an upbeat, joyful ambiance. These sonorous elements are combined with the moving image, which 'directs' the viewer's experience. All the videos depict moving bodies, and so promote interpersonal connections held together by the music track, using varying visual symbols to communicate their message. Meziane uses real images from the protests, creating a sense of co-authorship between her and the protesters, reinforced by her use of iconic phrases from the Hirak. Soolking refuses to impose any transparent image of protest by choosing instead to be alone in the

video, with ‘the people’ represented metaphorically by a fire. *Libérez l’Algérie*, like *Allo le Système !*, surrounds the viewer with people to give the impression of a moment of protest. It does, however, fail to represent some important categories of society, although it is the only work here to use four different languages with no translation. All the works protect opacity in different ways, by referencing other influential people beyond themselves and avoiding totalising narratives. YouTube affects one’s experience of music videos as it recommends further videos alongside the one being watched, provides a public space for users to discuss the songs, and facilitates the creation of music reaction videos, which expose the songs to wider audiences and fuel further discussion. Making this additional information accessible gives the user a glimpse of the sheer unfathomable complexity of the Hirak.

4. Conclusion

Through an analysis of photography, street art and music video relevant to the Algerian Hirak, this study addressed the role artistic expression plays in challenging the reductive perceptions of the movement as an 'awakening', that it would descent into violence, or that certain musicians can be considered 'icons'. It also explored the ways in which the additional features and participatory cultures of Instagram and YouTube affect the influence and dissemination of artworks viewed within their parameters. The study was inspired by the need to consider alternative, nuanced visions of the Hirak, to contribute to an understanding of the movement that takes its complexities into account and does not seek to simplify it. This was combined with the growing need to examine how social media platforms are changing the ways we view art, listen to music, and relate to one another.

The study focused largely on the simplistic narratives that labelled the Hirak an 'awakening' and that expressed surprise that it was peaceful, due to neo-colonial stereotypes of Algerians as 'violent'. It also considered specific 'icon' and 'anthem' labels that were erroneously attached to songs that engaged with the movement. The study revealed that art on Instagram tends to subtly acknowledge problems in society while communicating optimism and belief in the Algerian people as actors of positive change. They do this first through aesthetic choices such as the use of vibrant colour and juxtaposition between the desirable and undesirable image. Their location within the Instagram cyberspace means that older, pre-Hirak images are available to be viewed alongside more recent ones, and geotags provide access to external photo pools, revealing a complex and dynamic set of interconnected and diverse stories that inform one another and impede the creation of stereotypes. Political engagement and awareness are signalled long before the beginning of the Hirak, and new images can shed light on older ones. Furthermore, as users seek to recreate their authentic offline self within this space, their interaction with artwork is a personal act that forms part of the fabric of their cyberself, and they are aware of the artist's presence within the same space. These interpersonal connections impede the process of dehumanisation that is required to comfortably reduce an entire collective movement to a set of simple transparencies, and reveal the profound impact social media can have on the experience of art.

Music videos on YouTube combine the lyrics, sound and moving image to draw the spectator in and encourage interpersonal attachment between artist, viewer and, at times, the protesters. They tend to particularly emphasise the pacifist nature of the Hirak either verbally or through slow, relaxed beats and melodies. They provide varying levels of context to the movement, often making cross-cultural references, particularly to football which greatly influenced the Hirak. This was also found to be true of the artists on Instagram. In the YouTube space, these references act as access points to discover other influential protest songs, which ultimately counters the 'icon' and 'anthem' labels that were attached to the songs by Western media. They also use sound and/or lyrical metaphors to evoke the tension that was building before the Hirak, rather than suggesting it was an awakening. I found that reaction videos were a useful tool for understanding the emotional and educational impact the songs may have on differently situated viewers, as well as the misjudgements they make. Reaction videos are a testament to the vast network of interactions that take place within the YouTube space in reaction to the music video, that infiltrate other creators' comments sections and ultimately influence their decision to listen to the song and publicly react to it themselves. The original comments section and these subsequent discussion boards, along with YouTube's 'recommended videos' feature, provide the individual spectator with a wealth of diverse perspectives and additional information that can continuously undo and nuance their understanding of the complexity of the Hirak.

This thesis relied on a combination of Glissant's *opacité* and a symbolic interactionist understanding of the projection of self within the cyberspace. When applied to online art and music relating to protest in a post-colonial society, these theories acted as effective tools to examine how protesters creatively resist the transparent (often neo-colonial) categorisations frequently imposed upon them, as well as how these expressions are received and understood in the online spaces of Instagram and YouTube. This approach could be adapted to a wide range of contexts involving subversive artistic expression online. Each social media platform and website has its own specific conditions that influence the spectators' experience, and even within the ones I discussed here there are many more avenues to be explored. A future study within the context of the Hirak could address more social media platforms, notably Facebook, as well as looking at different forms of artistic production.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Transcription of *Allo le Système !* (2019), Raja Meziane

ṭoufan rahou jay naḍou zwawla

warjou wlad eš3b ou xrej moḥ moul aṭabla

xazina *à plat* lbled raha 3aṭla

almous t9ab la3ḍm ou talet bina l'ṭayla

ḍrabtou ta3lim perditou ljil ou raha sayba

société 3iba, raha ta9afa ʁayba

š3b isouṭi fi bouṭi, wntouma ḥasbin, tab9ou fiha xaldin

rdemtouna filḥayat xalitou mouta ḥakmin

ḍaḥiktou 3lina ga3 alijnas oub9ina laxirin

mazal alnes mljou3 tmout wntouma zahyin

bouledkoum lahyin

ṭal3tou lḥiṭ fel *club des pins* ou rakoum mxabyin

alf milliards felriḥ mšat ou mazal ṭam3in

felbagra ḥalbyin

9asimtou lʁella wal petrol orakou mkemlin

3lina 3fsin wlyoum marana saktin

marana xayfin

joumhouria, bʁinaha š3bia

dimokratia, mahi malakia

zawali kwatu kia mlkadre rah it9ia

rana jina ṭoufan, xṭouna ya bandia

sm3ni mliḥ ya šyat gutlik farab3a

ʁir insani fi xobzik 2ana mani ṭam3a

klitou lbled ya harka wlyoum rahi ḥabsa

wabʁitou tzidou lxamsa

ḥsbatou š3biba na3sa

xarjna lzn9a ngoulou xlaṣ ou rakoum xayfin

lilfawḍa ḥabin, xsertou wa rabḥna had al mara

ou makoum ṭalgin, rakoum ḥalfin

taxlou lbled fi mḥna kḥla wtbdou harbin

rana šafyin, ma rana nasyin, ma rana msamḥin

xd3tou tarix watora ou mazal ka2in šahdin

3likoum ḥa9din

winšalla tarja had lbled wat3woudou xaybin

APPENDIX B: Translation of *Allo le Système !* (2019), Raja Meziane (adapted from subtitles, Raja Meziane 2019)

The flood is at your door, the crowd is coming out

Young, old, jobless and even the street hustlers

The coffers are empty, the country is bankrupt

The knife pierced the marrow and it has been for too long

You have crushed education, a whole generation is lost

Society is blocked, culture is absent

People leave the country in makeshift boats, you think you're eternal

You have buried us alive and left dead people in power

We have become the laughingstock of all

People are starving and you're partying

You care for no one but your kids

Hidden behind the walls of Club des Pins you're frightened

1000 billion dollars gone up in smoke and you still want more

Oil rents well-kept and shared among you

And you crush us again, today we are not silent anymore, today we no longer fear

(CHORUS)

We want a republic

People's democracy

Not a monarchy

People have suffered enough – they're sick of you!

We are the flood, you'd best leave us alone, bunch of thugs

[allo? allo le systeme ? can you hear me or are you plugging your ears as usual?]

Listen to me, puppet of the system, I told you at the 4th mandate

Just leave me alone, I won't be part of it [I won't eat from the regime]

You took it all [you ate the country you traitor] and there is not much left to take

You still want a 5th round!

You thought the youth were asleep

Now we are in the streets to say stop, and you are shaking

You hope for chaos

This time we win, you lose! But you will never quit

You vowed to leave the country to fire and blood and run away

We know you well, we have not forgotten

We will not forgive

You have corrupted history and betrayed the revolution, the witnesses are still there and despise you

I pray [inshallah] for the country to recover and for you to get what you deserve.

(CHORUS)

APPENDIX C: lyrics to *Liberté* (2019), Soolking

Paraît que le pouvoir s'achète, liberté, c'est tout c'qui nous reste

Si le scénario se répète, on sera acteurs de la paix

Si faux, vos discours sont si faux

Ouais, si faux, qu'on a fini par s'y faire

Mais c'est fini, le verre est plein

En bas, ils crient, entends-tu leurs voix ?

La voix d'ces familles pleines de chagrin

La voix qui prie pour un meilleur destin

Excuse-moi d'exister, excuse mes sentiments

Et si j'dis que j'suis heureux avec toi, je mens

Excuse-moi d'exister, excuse mes sentiments

Rends-moi ma liberté, je te l'demande gentiment

[Soolking]

La liberté, la liberté, la liberté

C'est d'abord dans nos cœurs

La liberté, la liberté, la liberté

Nous, ça nous fait pas peur

[Chorus: Soolking & Ouled El Bahdja]

La liberté, la liberté, la liberté

C'est d'abord dans nos cœurs

La liberté, la liberté, la liberté

Nous, ça nous fait pas peur

[Soolking]

Ils ont cru qu'on était morts, ils ont dit "bon débarras"

Ils ont cru qu'on avait peur de ce passé tout noir

Il n'y a plus personne, que des photos, des mensonges

Que des pensées qui nous rongent, c'est bon, emmenez-moi là-bas

Oui, il n'y a plus personne, là-bas, il n'y a que le peuple

Che Guevara, Matoub, emmenez-moi là-bas

J'écris ça un soir pour un nouveau matin

Oui, j'écris pour y croire, l'avenir est incertain

Oui, j'écris car nous sommes, nous sommes main dans la main

Moi, j'écris car nous sommes la génération dorée

(CHORUS)

[Ouled El Bahdja & Soolking]

Libérez li rahi otage, libérez lmerḥouma, kayen khalel f lqada' [Free the hostages, free the dead, there is a problem with justice]

Libérez ceux qui sont otages, nous, c'est tout c'qu'on a

On a que la liberta

W ḥna homa l'ibtila', ah ya ḥoukouma, w nnar hadi ma tetfach [we are your obstable, oh government, and this flame will never go out]

Ceci est notre message, notre ultima verba

(CHORUS)

APPENDIX D: Transcription of *Libérez l'Algérie* (2019), Various artists

yema katri mn d3awi wladek rahoum xarjin

ymshiyou 3al ḥouria, yema wladek mtḥaḍrin

ṭalbin dimou9araṭia hak alward zid alyasmin

fi masira silmiya 3a taʁyir m3awlin

lyoum eš3b *est libéré*

Libérez l'Algérie

Libérez, libérez

Libérez l'Algérie x2

eš3b il3b 3šra wa system mafahmouš

coup d'ciseaux ijibha barra, wi marki ma taḥagrouš

3šra snin tadmar 3šra, walou mazal mašb3touš

ou brabi had lamara walou nada matfoutouš

(CHORUS)

ya bladi bkawk dmou3

message lga3 ma'oulin, *y'en a marre*

krahna mnkoun hadou 3šrin waḥna ṣabrin

ya dzair 9lbi rah m3mar, youm nsm3 ṣouti xalouni nhadr

silmi ana majitš nkasser ngoul lḥa9, ma raniš nxessr

(interlude)

ḥouria fardia, ḥouria jama3ia

kolna mwaṭinin fi ixtilafna maḥtarmin

lbestou barnous al3ar, behdeltouna ma3 lajnas

ḥnaya nmoutou falbiḥar

ou ntoum tawiyou fi blad inas

(CHORUS)

rana ḥabin n3išou krahna m3išat dal

koul waḥed yeddi ḥagou fi blad 9anoun ou 3dl

atarbia louladna asas jil l'ʁad

tha9afa mosta9ila ṣaḥafa ḥoura bla snasel

(CHORUS)

Verse 6 - Sadek Bouzinou

lyoum xdina lmas'oulia wa xrajna ltaʁyir

ga3 šabiba jazairia ou ga3 nawin alxir

jamais la nafaslou wali ṣar iṣir

lyed filyed wallah nwaṣlou itḥa9a9 ḥalmna lkbir

(CHORUS)

(Kabyle)

yima th3douyagh stoustha

arawin athifoughn tidoun af thilili

ayyi tharwam touḥadhran

(Chenoua)

khssan athawyen hougthout

akh ajagjith akh ayasmint

gue hagouri nthalwit iwsanthal etlaghin

APPENDIX E: Translation of *Libérez l'Algérie* (2019), Various Artists

Mother multiply your prayers, your children are going out

They're going to march for freedom, mother your children are civilised

They demand democracy, with roses and jasmine

In a peaceful march, they ask for change

(CHORUS)

Today, the people are freed, free Algeria, free, free Algeria x 2

The people played as number 10

But the system didn't understand

With a snip of the scissors, they will be out

Decade after decade and you're still not done

Thank god that this time, nothing will pass you by

(CHORUS)

Oh my country, we made you cry tears

A message to those in charge

We've had enough, we hate you

We've been waiting for 20 years

Oh Algeria, my heart is full, I want my voice to be heard

Peacefully, I'm not messing around

I'm telling the truth, I'm not here to break things

Individual freedom, collective freedom

We are all citizens and we respect each other's differences

You wore the bernous of dishonour

And you humiliated us in front of the nations

We are dying in the sea while you are healed abroad

(CHORUS)

We want to live in peace, not indignity

Everyone must play their part in the country of justice and rights

An education for our children, the future generation

A clean culture and a free press

(CHORUS)

Today we took up our responsibility, we marched for change

All Algerian youth, our intentions are good

You will never quash us, we will go until the end

Hand in hand, by God we will get there and our dream will be realised

(CHORUS)

(First verse repeated in Kabyle and Chenoua)